

ORIOLE

AD REINHARDT & FRANCO VIMERCATI

30.11.2024 – 25.1.2025

OPENING 29.11.2024, 6 – 8 PM

Neuer Wall 72 20354 Hamburg

PRESS RELEASE

“Whether pale enough to almost vanish in the light or barely distinguishable from the black background, the object does not appear in any way closer or more familiar. On the contrary, it turns out to be even more remote, opaque, and alien. Removed from its banal context and contemplated for long enough, it reinvents itself as an enigma. And the question it presents us with is silence.”¹

These words were written about the photographer Franco Vimercati, but could just as easily describe the monochromatic paintings of Ad Reinhardt. Vimercati makes use of everyday objects the way Reinhardt makes use of geometric forms. For both artists such content is not the work’s focal point, but rather serves as a vehicle for a perceptual experience, one rooted in a contemplative slowing down of time that turns the viewer’s attention to their own perception, rather than offering a narrative to get lost in.

The lens of Vimercati’s camera centers the object and melts away context by emphasizing the object’s presence, as if hovering in a timeless, eternal present. The floating frames Reinhardt specially designed for his black paintings similarly set off the canvas from its surroundings, inviting us to focus on the painting’s surface. What do we find there? A play of close-valued tones calibrated to open up a self-reflective state of mind, as we chase after a slowly unfolding oscillation between the presentation and revocation of form. Everything that feels as if it is in the process of emerging—the crossing of the painting’s horizontal and vertical bands, for example—is rescinded, submerging back into the painting’s murky depths as soon as we chase after it. This is not unlike Vimercati’s photographic poems in chiaroscuro, where the more we look the less aware we are of the photographed object and the more we get lost in the formal relationships Vimercati elicits from it. The contrast between light and dark in an antique soup tureen, for example. Repetition aids in this process, serving to further estrange the object by rendering it mutable in the subtle differences that we become aware of, rather than reinforcing some sort of singular essence.

Reinhardt understood his black paintings, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as “the last paintings” anyone could paint. Reinhardt’s own photography perhaps contains clues to how he envisioned art’s future. He took thousands of images, often on his numerous trips around the globe, and assembled selections into slide presentations, which he gave as hybrid artistic-pedagogical statements that he humorously dubbed “non-happenings.” Not unlike Vimercati’s photographs, Reinhardt often chose to elicit certain unexpected formal relationships through clever uses of a frontal presentation and the cropping out of extraneous elements.

Vimercati had certain favored subjects. For example, a soup tureen, or planks of parquet flooring, upon which he lavished large amounts of time, energy and focus. The same investments underwrote Reinhardt’s black paintings. The tenacity with which both artists stuck to their favored motifs and techniques, is due to the fact that they yielded slightly different results every time. Vimercati’s camera elicited variations, if sometimes difficult to identify, with every shot of even the most familiar object, just as the perceptual unfolding of each of Reinhardt’s black painting differs in subtle ways. The viewer of Vimercati and Reinhardt’s work is in turn rewarded when they take up the challenge presented by the engaged modes of looking invited by both artist’s works.

— Alex Bacon

¹ Simone Menegoi, “Photographing Photography, Four Reflections on Franco Vimercati,” trans. Victoria Miller, in *Archivio Franco Vimercati*, eds. Franco Vimercati: *la fotografia, la vita. Un dialogo con Giorgio Morandi* (Madrid: Istituto Italiano di Cultura, 2019). As reprinted in Marco Scotini, ed., *Franco Vimercati Un Minuto Di Fotografia / One Minute of Photography* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020), 75, 77.