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Francis Baudevin

Taken from *Francis Baudevin - Miscellaneous Abstract*, JRP|Ringier, Zurich, 2009

Has Francis Baudevin ever really composed any of his pictures ? He paints these works, but does he create the composition, the arrangement of forms and their relation to one another within the frame ? Does he select the colors for his paintings ? Or even devise the titles ? The answer would have to be that he does, for all of them and none of them. Baudevin's is a found abstraction, but with the caveat that anything found and used by an artist is also entirely chosen. Since the late 1980s his paintings and wall paintings have been based on graphics designed for various products, primarily pharmaceuticals, as well as for logos and album covers. In the appropriation, Baudevin's main act is that of removal : he takes away the type, leaving only the graphics, and so no products are identified or advertised. Some may be recognizable – the artwork for the sleeve of the New Order single *Everything's Gone Green* or a packet of Valium – but most are not. Baudevin never varies the colors from those of the original, and his only real departure is scale, with the original enlarged to the canvas or the wall by ten times or more. And yet the paintings are clearly, to use his term, handcrafted. Though they may be seen as recycled, as already existing in the world, these images have been transformed by their rendering in paint on canvas or wall. They are neither printed nor silk-screened but painted, and while the original images were mass-produced, products of mechanical reproduction, Baudevin's paintings are unique and his wall paintings ephemeral. The color, line, flatness, and graphic quality of his paintings follow the crisp and bold design of his source imagery. In its original form, the design is meant to attract potential consumers. It would be a mistake, however, to see Baudevin's project as critical or ironic, as a commentary on the culture of consumption (or self-medication) and distraction. His interest, like that of the graphic and packaging designers and the artists who produced the logos and album covers, is simply visual communication. Both package and painting are meant to convey information. Baudevin, of course, is aware of the history of graphic design and of geometric abstraction, and that it is in many ways a shared one. In Switzerland, where Baudevin is from, abstract painters such as Max Bill and Richard Paul Lohse had to work in graphic design by necessity, as has Baudevin. In basing his paintings on package design and logos, he is in effect taking back, or re-appropriating, the history that influence dits commercial counterpart.