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Thomas Wachholz

Light

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The simple action of striking a match is the kind of daily routine that occupies Thomas Wachholz. Aside from the banality of its everyday occurrence, for Wachholz it is in some way the perfect distillation of the dichotomy between human and industrial processes. After all, it is a unique and fallible hand that sweeps the generic match across the endlessly reproducible box.

Though their clean and minimal forms, the works in this exhibition perfectly examine the duality of this very contemporary condition: individuality expressed via endlessly mass-produced products, processes and media. The extension of this is the feeling is that production itself is also endless. As industrial automation is now the norm, the diminishing presence of humans in many factories begs a number of questions, for example; where is the human hand in these processes? And; Is there even a need for a human hand?. Essentially, when watching the ballet of automotive robots assembling a car there is the distinct feeling that they could and probably would just keep assembling cars, endlessly and infinitely, even humans ceased to exist.

Wachholz is keenly aware of this endlessness and explores it via forms that suggest the extensive and monotonous nature of industry. In particular, an eye-level, hand-produced line of matchbox striker surface extending from the front to the back of the gallery space. In taking something that is normally rendered on a visually and tangibly finite surface and extending it in such a way that it can potentially disappear from view, a notion of infinity is implied and we are provided with an echo of industry in perpetuity. The very same industry that one day may continue without us.

Here though, a human presence is however evidenced and is clearly indicated by the strike marks upon the perfectly functional striker line. To achieve this Wachholz essentially had to back-engineer the formula for the striker chemical in order to be able to reproduce this onto the wall. Again a conflation of the human and the industrial, this time however Wachholz decidedly de-industrializes and does so by turning a processes that would normally take a factory full of machines into something done by just one human.

These strike marks - a record, so to speak, of the various inconsistencies of gesture when lighting a match - can also be found on the exhibited panel works. Differing slightly from the afore mentioned line, these works again use the same reddish-brown striker paint, however in this instance it is used to cover the works in a fine honeycomb structure, the likes of which can be found on matchboxes worldwide. Similarly to the line, these works are a kind of extended version of their real-world inspiration and also operate in a very particular field of vision. However whereas the line has endless directionality these works become an expansive and enveloping visual field amplified by the stroboscopic effect caused by the small, regularly placed dots.

This illusion of slight movement is at once hypnotic and nauseating and adds a sense of instability to the works that in a way speaks of Wachholz's practice as a whole. The constant interplay between dualistic and perhaps contradictory forces provides an imbalance that keeps the works from saying any one particular thing thus opening up a poetic space in the liminal regions of meaning. Just as how the eyes - when looking at the honeycomb works - want to settle on a particular point and yet cant due to the strobing of the dots, when experiencing Wachholz's works it is the mind looking for a solid place to land. More often than not however one has to settle for contemplative ambiguity, neither one thing nor the other, a very contemporary condition.

Thomas Wachholz (b 1984, Cologne) graduated from the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with Profs. Katharina Grosse and Marcel Odenbach in 2016. Wachholz has had solo exhibitions at Mier Gallery, Los Angeles (2016), RaebervonStenglin, Zürich (2014), Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles (2014). He recently participated in group exhibitions including Marres, House for Contemporary Culture, Maastricht; Natalia Hug, Cologne; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; KIT - Kunst im Tunnel, Düsseldorf; Yves Klein Archive, Paris; New Galerie, Paris, and Pinakothek Der Moderne, Munich (upcoming). Thomas Wachholz lives and works in Cologne.