Andrea Rosen Gallery is proud to present *Paintings*, an exhibition of new work by Josiah McElheny. This is the artist’s fourth solo exhibition with the gallery.

Josiah McElheny’s artwork has often investigated the history of twentieth century modernism in architecture and design, in the hope of expanding on the dominant historical narrative and the criticality of our relationship to it. While continuing this dialogue with the history of aesthetics, *Paintings* represents a shift in McElheny’s work towards a focus on the history of painting, and proposes that there is ongoing potential to be found in the utopian and revolutionary desires that gave rise to abstract painting at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 2007, McElheny exhibited his work alongside the paintings of the “lost” pioneer of abstraction, Hilma af Klint (1862-1944), as part of a curatorial collaboration with curator Iris Müller-Westermann at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Af Klint is now finally credited with making the first non-objective painting in the Western fine-art tradition, and it is both her grand imagination and sense of purpose, and the idea of how histories are and can be constantly re-written, that has informed and inspired McElheny’s new works.

In looking at the history of abstraction, through a scholarly approach, McElheny traces some of the essential moments of the past century. Referring to specific works by artists Kazimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky, Maya Deren, Ellsworth Kelly, Ad Reinhardt and Albert Oehlen, that were canonical touchstones and contributions to the conceptual fabric of this history, are here reimagined through the lens of the recently re-discovered visionary, af Klint. Her presence is seen in the various colors, prismatic effects, geometries and other elements of af Klint’s symbolic language that appear in McElheny’s paintings, conceptually collaged into the compositional approaches of these other familiar historical and living artists.

The smooth surface of McElheny’s works, each faced with a plane of glass, is something that one sees through, and beyond. Challenging a Modernist perspective that painting is defined by and bound to its surface, these paintings—constructions of wood, mirror, glass, paint and, in two instances, video projection—acknowledge a painting’s physical and imaginable space. Creating an image on, in and behind this material plane, the paintings alternate from “flat” to “deep”, when simply viewed from the front and then the side.

Five paintings structured after works by Kandinsky and Malevich—McElheny’s *Crystalline Prism Painting I*, *II*, *III*, *IV*, and *VI*—feature press-molded and polished glass prisms inset into a field of black,
For edited Visual Contemporary Dempsey, Stockholm Accompanying Across abstraction. these “another earlier into” fracturing depict Painting prismatic Borrowed painting within Prism matte media Two moving oil to I their McElheny screens Looking at Abstraction. Projection I and II are both made in homage to another pioneer of abstraction (and surrealism), the filmmaker Maya Deren. Starting with lost and “abandoned” footage created by Deren, McElheny has re-filmed, deconstructed and extensively processed these moving images to suggest a world of abstraction that sometimes coalesces into bodies or objects, or, in reverse, where mannerist bodies passing through the painting seem to dissolve themselves into granular abstraction.

Across all these works, McElheny hopes to suggest the possibility of an expanded experience of viewing, a view of the images that exist within painting where the viewer’s own physical movement offers additional vistas, imaginary or not. In McElheny’s hands, mining the past lays the groundwork for a path forward, giving a glimpse not only into what could have been, but visions for what might be.

Accompanying the exhibition, is a new publication, a supplemental book that presents scholarly texts by curator and art historian, Iris Müller-Westermann, Senior Curator of International Art at Moderna Museet, Stockholm and by New York based scholar, critic and curator, Alex Bacon; in addition it includes a visual essay that traces the specific historical inspirations and touchstones for this group of works, in hopes to speak to both the past and future. An expanded exhibition catalogue, building upon the initial publication, will be published in October 2015.


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