

PHILIPPE VAN SNICK / PERMUTATIE 1972 - 2015
24.04 - 29.05.2016





(ENG)

We are honoured to present the third solo show at the gallery by Belgian artist Philippe Van Snick. Since his retrospective at Museum M Leuven in 2010, the artist has rightfully been receiving growing international acclaim. In 2015 Van Snick was invited for a duo exhibition with Daniel Steegmann Mangrané at MAM Rio de Janeiro & Casa Modernista, São Paulo, curated by Marta Mestre. Currently De Hallen Haarlem (curator Xander Karskens) & Grazer Kunstverein (curator Krist Gruijthuisen) are co-presenting two parallel survey shows to create a broader picture of this rich artistic oeuvre. Van Snick's work is also part of 'The Gap', an exhibition on Belgian abstract art curated by Luc Tuymans at Muhka, Antwerp, previously on show at the Parasol Unit Foundation, London.

The exhibition at Tatjana Pieters complements this exposure by presenting Van Snick's latest incarnation of his ten-colour practice in combination with a precise selection of works from every previous decade. It marks the systematic but free use of the same parameters throughout his oeuvre since the '70's. Right after he graduated from the academy, Van Snick temporarily left the medium of painting as it did not fulfill his need for experiment. Fascinated by the conceptual art of that time, Van Snick started to examine patterns in cosmic logic and in daily life which led him to develop formulas and cipher codes that would later result in the use of his decimal colour system and the concept of duality in various forms. The title of the exhibition is based on this mathematical concept of permutation or the 'rearrangement of elements', apparent in works like 'Kruispunt' (1972-73), 'Bogen' (1977), '(0-9) Cijfercode' (1982), 'Symmetrische en Asymmetrische Dag- en Nachtreeks (blauw)' (1990), 'XX' (1993), 'Architectuur' (2007) and 'Eclips' (2015).

'Eviter le pire' (2013-2015) will be presented in its totality for the first time. The spatial impact of this work underlines the significance of the relation between space-colour-beholder in Van Snick's oeuvre. It is a monumental series that consists of eleven grids of nine canvases, with one grid in each of his ten colours and an eleventh grid featuring all ten colours in a particular combination. On the coloured backgrounds, the artist paints what he calls 'characters' in sky blue, a colour that reminds us of his attention to the cosmos and the relationship between abstraction and the real world, and symbolizes day in a duality with black signifying night.

Van Snick arrived at these characters through an interest in Aztec culture, in particular undeciphered codices. His abstract shapes look somewhat like incomprehensible symbols that conjure up the notion of an alphabet but avoid any direct connection to a known language. Van Snick is conscious of the hazards of working with such graphic compositions, including the risk that they may be confused with familiar symbols such as religious or radical signs. His concern to avoid such a fate led him to the title of the series, 'to avoid the worst'. For Van Snick, the characters are 'a sort of pre-language, unfixed, unsettled. It's like the language of paradise, in which words are not necessary.'*

Despite of the simple but consistent use of colour, shape, material and concept, the work by Philippe Van Snick can be considered a unique witness of its time. It seems to drive on a visionary force explaining its continued relevance in today's society.

Philippe Van Snick (1946, BE) lives & works in Brussels (BE). His work is in the museum collections of MoMA, New York (US), Mu.ZEE, Ostend (BE), M HKA, Antwerp (BE), S.M.A.K., Ghent (BE) and various private & corporate collections in Europe, USA and Latin-America. Van Snick received solo exhibitions at amongst others: Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro (BR), De Hallen Haarlem (NL), Grazer Kunstverein (AU), Museum M Leuven (BE), S.M.A.K., Ghent (BE), BOZAR, Brussels (BE), Art Gallery of York University, Toronto (CA) Nuno Centeno, Porto (PT), Arcade, London (UK). Recent group exhibitions include: The Corner Show, cur. Wouter Davidts, Phillip Metten and Mihnea Mircan, Extra City, Antwerp (BE); Conversation Piece, Mu.ZEE, Ostend (BE); Re: Painted, Schilderijen uit de collectie, S.M.A.K., Ghent (BE); Philippe Van Snick & June Crespo, PI, New York (USA); Esta puerto pide clavo, cur. RIVET (Sarah Demeuse & Manuela Moscoso), Tatjana Pieters, Ghent (BE); 1979 A Momentum to Radical Instants, cur. Carles Guerra, La Virreina, Barcelona (ES).

Tatjana Pieters, april 2016

* excerpt from 'Eviter le Pire, Philippe Van Snick' by Ellen Mara De Wachter.



(NL)

Het is een eer u uit te nodigen voor de derde solotentoonstelling in de galerie van de Belgische kunstenaar Philippe Van Snick. Sinds zijn retrospectieve in Museum M te Leuven in 2010 geniet de kunstenaar met recht en rede van een groeiende internationale belangstelling. In 2015 had hij een duotentoonstelling met Daniel Steegmann Mangrané in MAM, Rio De Janeiro & Casa Modernista, São Paulo (BR), gecureerd door Marta Mestre. Momenteel presenteren De Hallen Haarlem & Grazer Kunstverein twee parallelle overzichtstentoonstellingen met het oog op een bredere contextualisering van zijn rijke oeuvre, gecureerd door Xander Karskens & Krist Gruijthuisen. Het Muhka presenteert zijn werk tevens in 'The Gap', een tentoonstelling van Belgische abstracte kunst samengesteld door Luc Tuymans, die eerder te zien was in de Parasol Unit Foundation, Londen.

De tentoonstelling in de galerie sluit aan bij deze belichting met de presentatie van Van Snicks meest recente toepassing van zijn tienkleurenpraktijk in combinatie met een precieze selectie werken uit elk voorgaand decennium. Deze opzet onderlijnt Van Snicks systematische doch vrije gebruik van dezelfde parameters doorheen zijn oeuvre sinds de jaren '70. Net nadat de kunstenaar afstudeerde aan de academie, verliet hij tijdelijk het medium schilderkunst, omdat het niet voldeed aan zijn behoefte aan experiment. Gefascineerd door de conceptuele kunst van die tijd, startte Van Snick met het onderzoeken van patronen in de kosmische logica en het dagelijkse leven. Dit leidde hem ertoe formules en cijfercodes te ontwikkelen die later zouden resulteren in onder andere het gebruik van zijn decimaal kleurensysteem en het concept van dualiteit in verscheidene vormen. De titel van de tentoonstelling is gebaseerd op dit wiskundige concept van permutatie, of het 'herschikken van elementen', zichtbaar in werken zoals 'Kruispunt' (1972-73), '(0-9) Bogen' (1977), 'Symmetrische en Asymmetrische Dag-en Nachtreeks (blauw)' (1990), 'XX' (1993), 'Architectuur' (2007) en 'Eclips' (2015).

'Eviter le pire' (2013-2015) wordt voor het eerst in zijn totaliteit gepresenteerd. De ruimtelijke impact van dit werk benadrukt het belang van de relatie tussen ruimte-kleur-toeschouwer in Van Snicks oeuvre. Het is een monumentale reeks die bestaat uit elf roosters van negen canvassen, met elk rooster in één van zijn tien kleuren en een elfde waarin de tien kleuren samenkomen in Van Snicks gekende patronen. Op de gekleurde achtergrond schildert de kunstenaar wat hij noemt 'karakters' in hemelsblauw, een kleur die ons herinnert aan zijn aandacht voor de kosmos en de relatie tussen abstractie en de echte wereld en zo symbool staat voor dag in een dualiteit met zwart dat staat voor nacht.

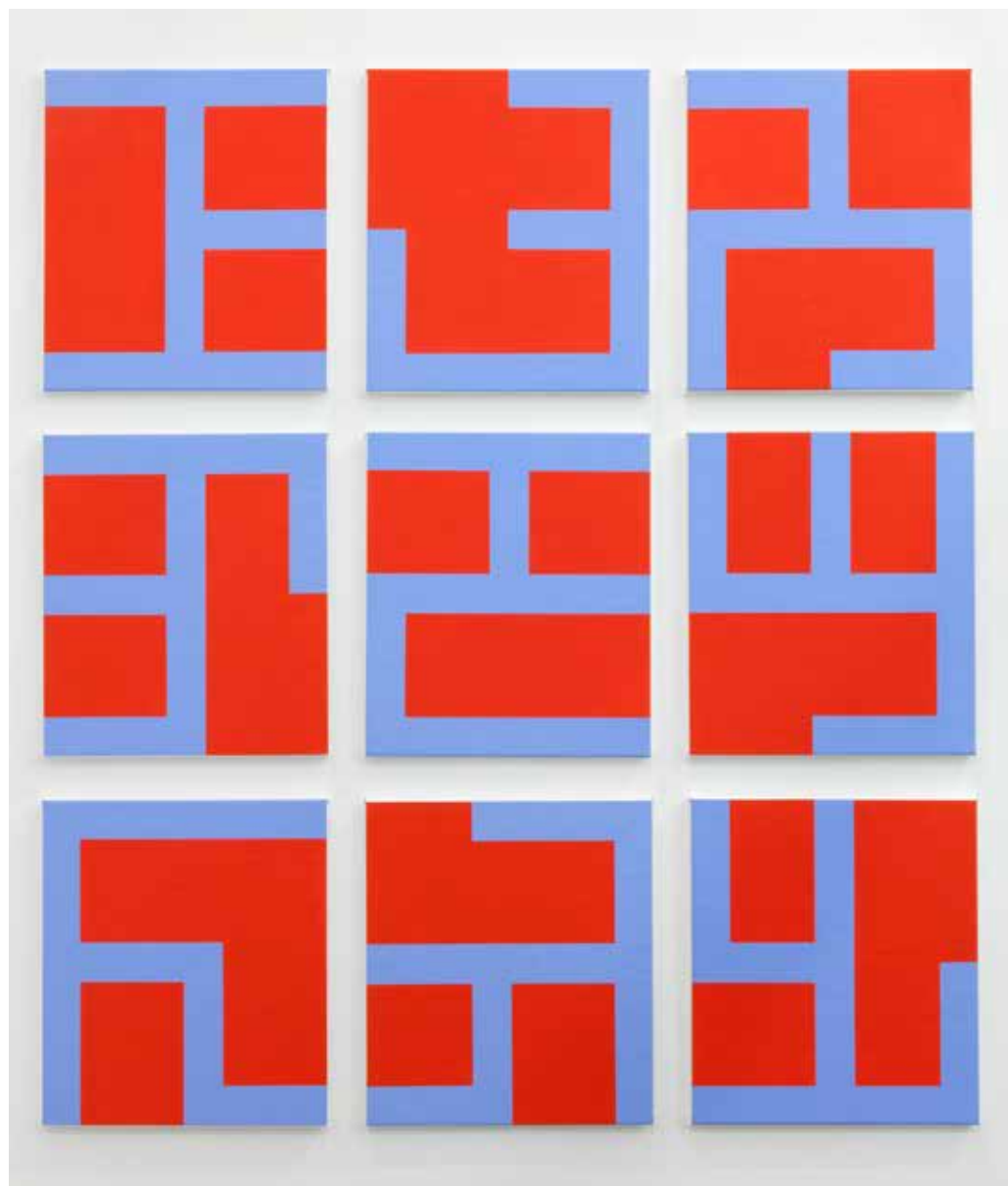
Van Snick begon deze karakters te gebruiken vanuit een interesse in de Azteekse cultuur, in het bijzonder in niet ontcijferde codes. Zijn abstracte vormen lijken ietwat onbegrijpelijke symbolen die spelen met de notie van een alfabet, maar ze gaan een directe connectie met een gekende taal uit de weg. De kunstenaar is zich bewust van het gevaar van werken met zulke grafische composities, inclusief het risico dat ze kunnen verward worden met bekende symbolen zoals religieuze of radicale tekens. De titel van dit werk, vertaald als 'het ergste vermijden', uit de kunstenaars bezorgdheid om dergelijk lot te vermijden. Voor Van Snick zijn de karakters 'een soort van pre-taal, onbestendig, veranderlijk. Het is als een paradijselijke taal waarin woorden overbodig zijn.'*

Ondanks het simpele maar consistente gebruik van kleur, vorm, materiaal en concept, kan elk werk van Philippe Van Snick gezien worden als een unieke getuigenis van zijn tijd. Zijn oeuvre lijkt aangedreven te worden door een visionaire kracht, die zijn continue relevantie verklaart in de hedendaagse samenleving.

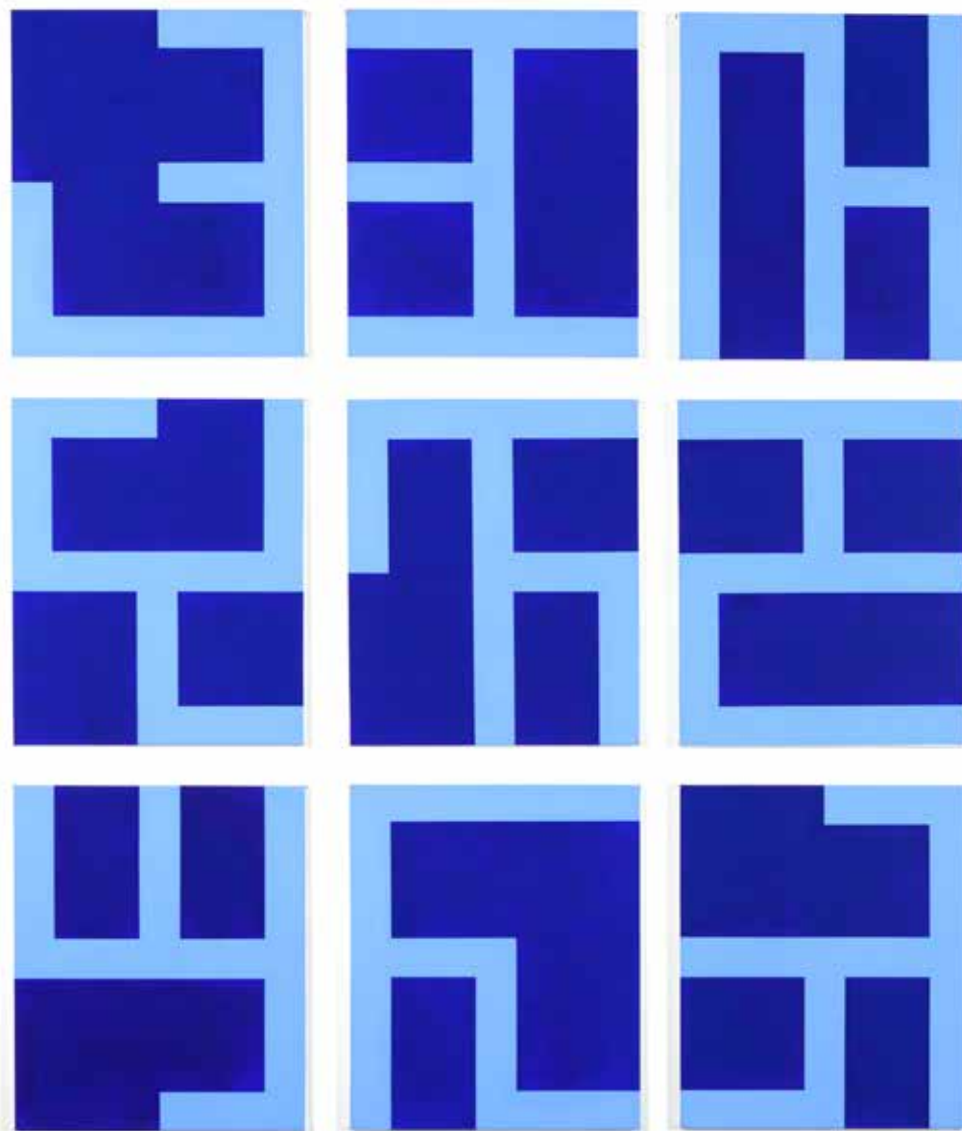
Philippe Van Snick (1946, BE) woont en werkt in Brussel (BE). Zijn werk maakt onder andere deel uit van de museale collecties van MoMA, New York (US), Mu.ZEE, Ostend (BE), M HKA, Antwerp (BE), S.M.A.K., Ghent (BE), en verschillende private collecties in Europa, de VS en Latijns-Amerika. Plaatsen waar hij solotentoonstellingen kreeg zijn onder andere: Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro (BR), De Hallen Haarlem (NL), Grazer Kunstverein (AU), Museum M Leuven (BE), S.M.A.K., Ghent (BE), BOZAR, Brussels (BE), Art Gallery of York University, Toronto (CA) Nuno Centeno, Porto (PT), Arcade, London (UK). Enkele recente groepstentoonstellingen zijn: The Corner Show, cur. Wouter Davidts, Phillip Metten & Mihnea Mircan, Extra City, Antwerp (BE); Conversation Piece, Mu.ZEE, Ostend (BE); Re: Painted, Schilderijen uit de collectie, S.M.A.K., Ghent (BE); Philippe Van Snick & June Crespo, P!, New York (USA); Esta puerto pide clavo, cur. RIVET (Sarah Demeuse & Manuela Moscoso), Tatjana Pieters, Ghent (BE); 1979 A Momentum to Radical Instants, cur. Carles Guerra, La Virreina, Barcelona (ES).

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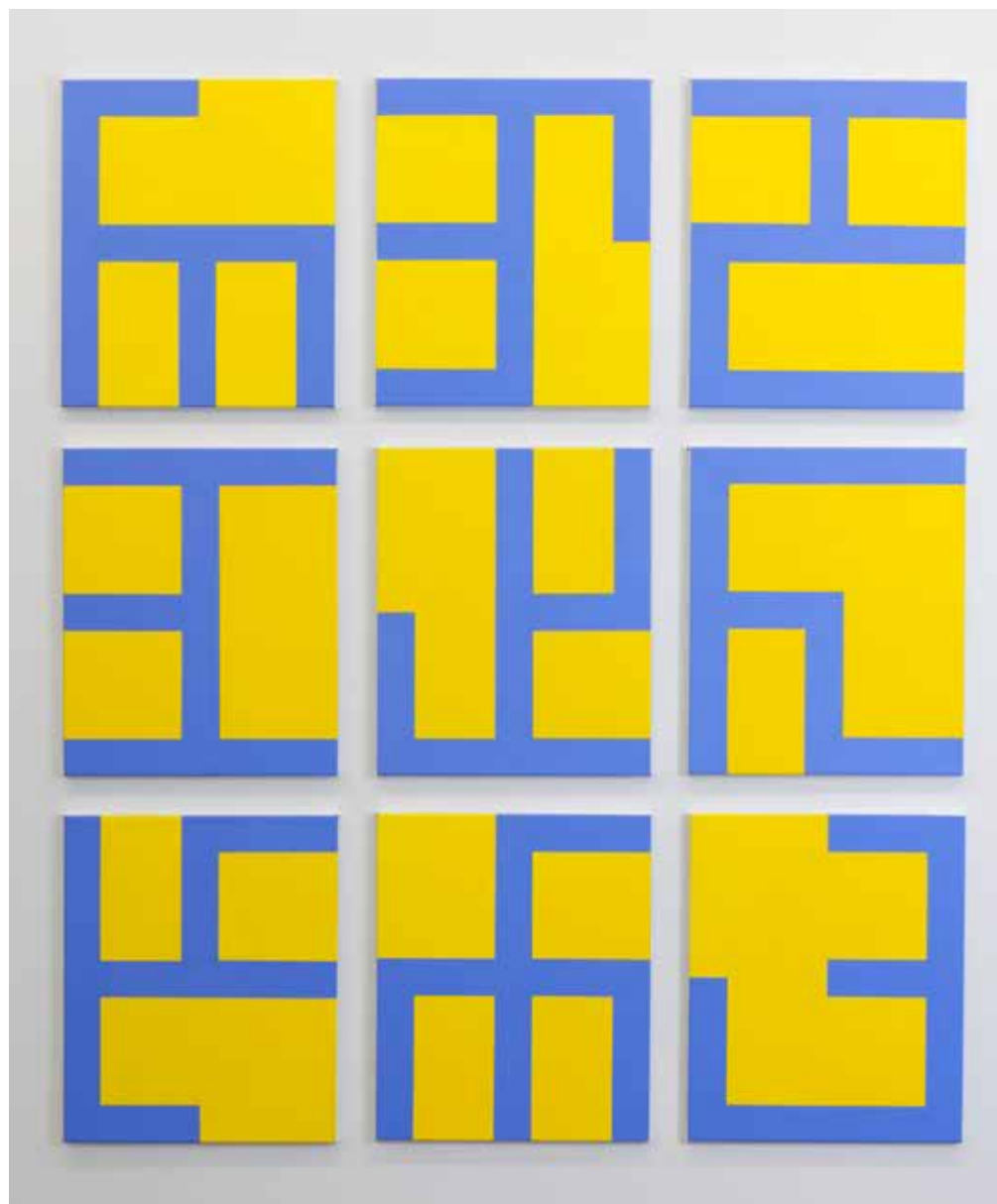
* vertaald van een fragment uit 'Eviter le Pire, Philippe Van Snick', door Ellen Mara De Wachter.



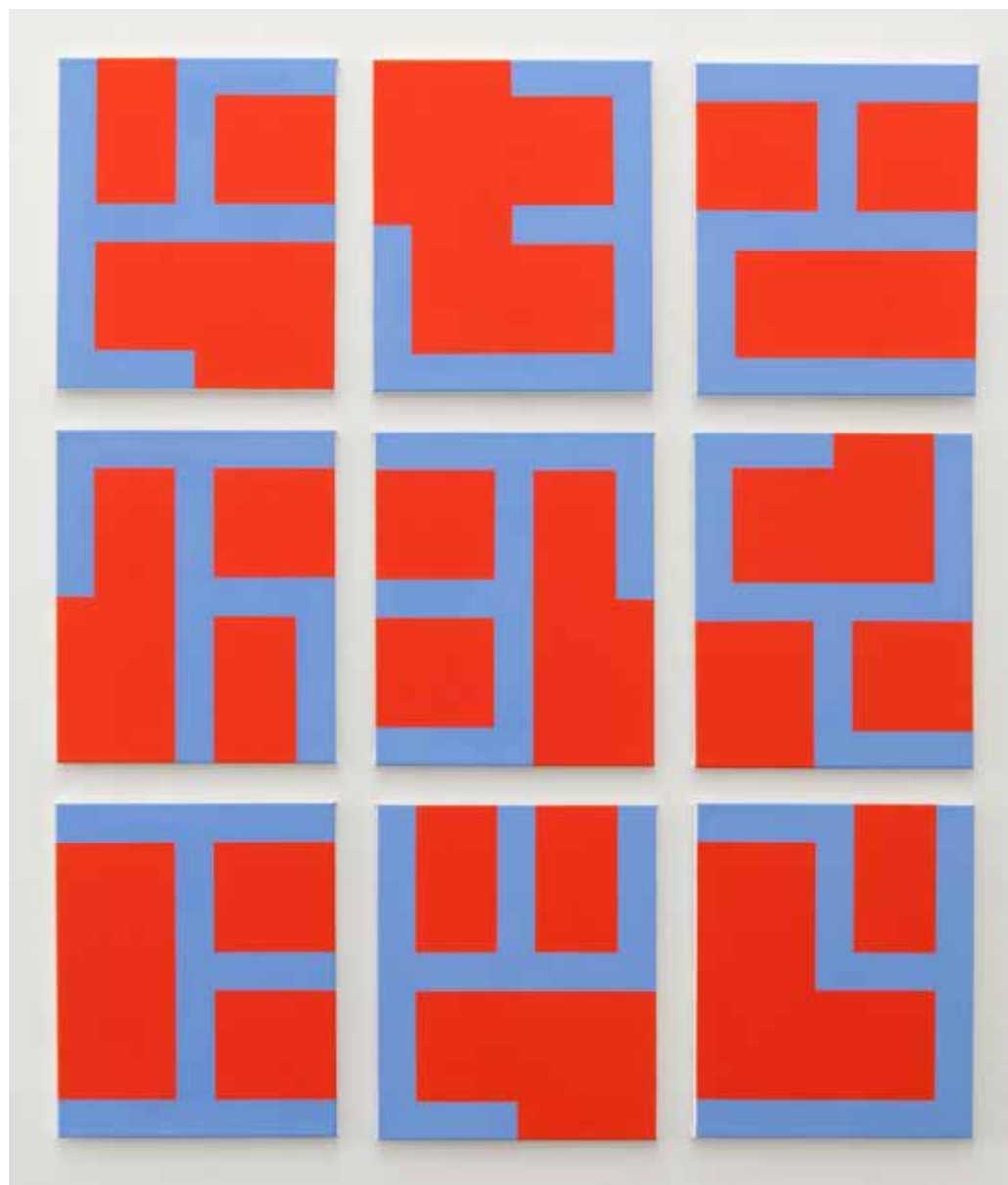
Eviter le pire (red), 2013
vinyl on canvas
9 x (58 x 51) cm
unique



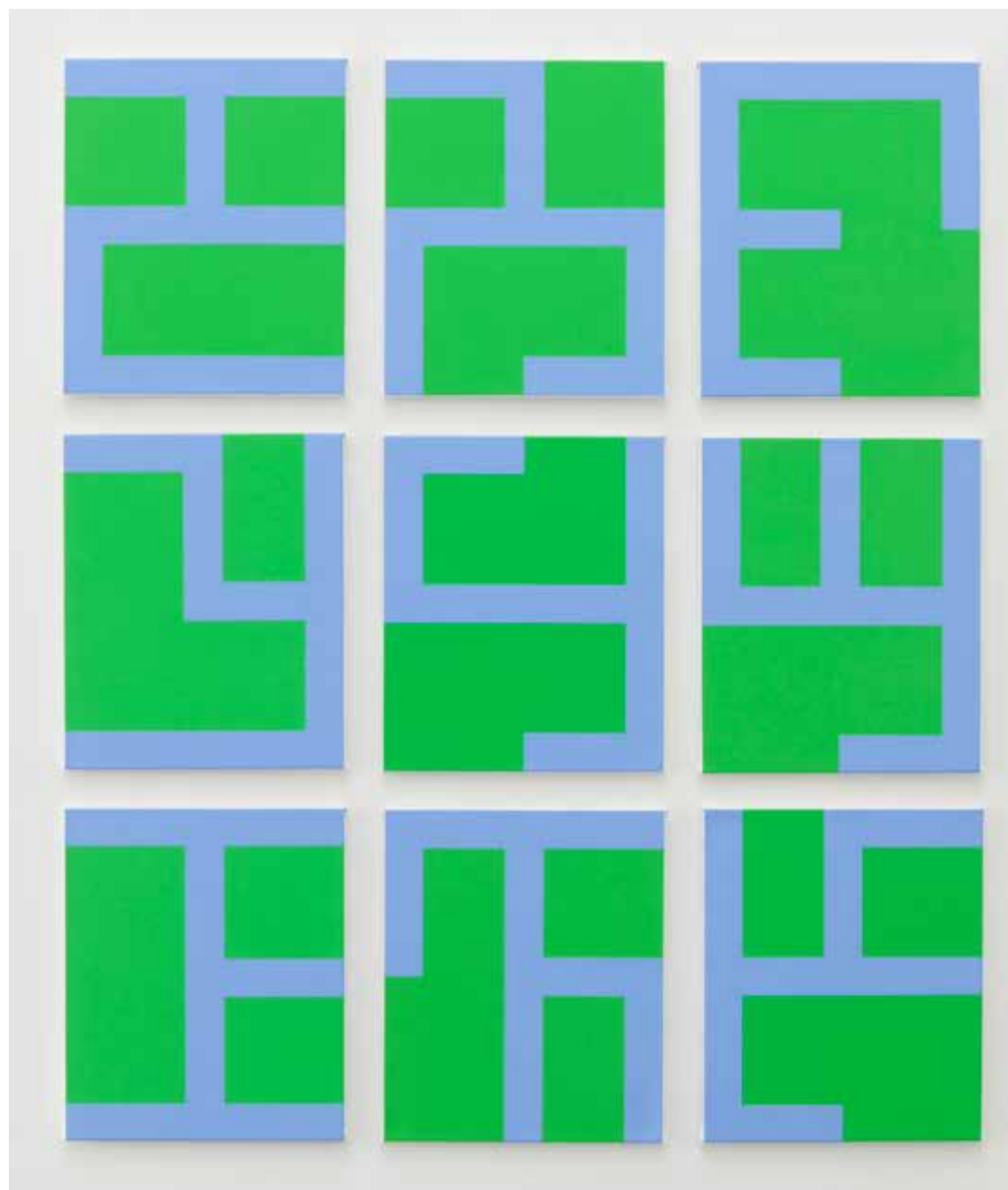
Eviter le pire (blue), 2013
vinyl on canvas
9 x (61 x 51) cm
unique



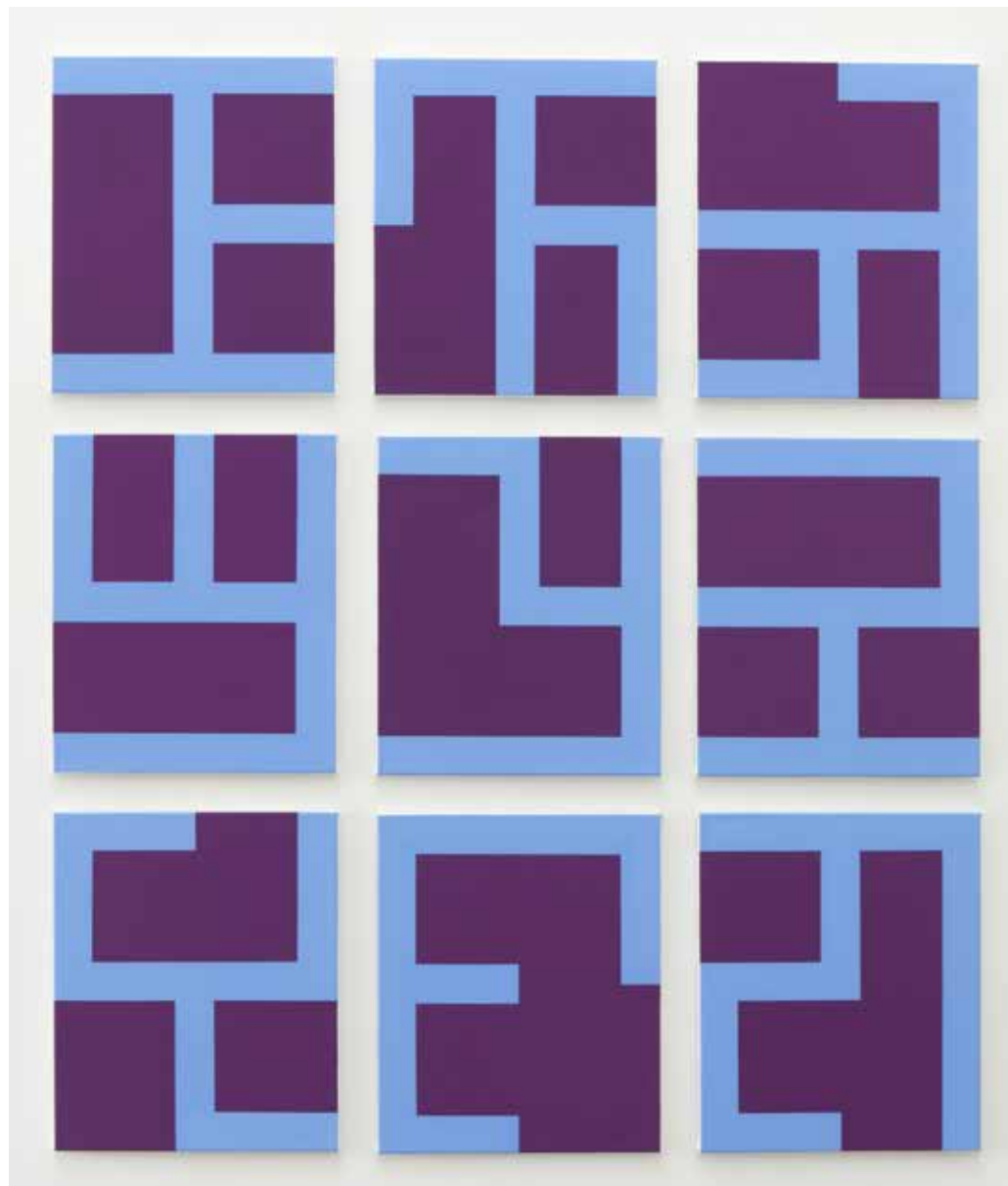
Eviter le pire (yellow), 2013
vinyl on canvas
9 x (61 x 51) cm
unique



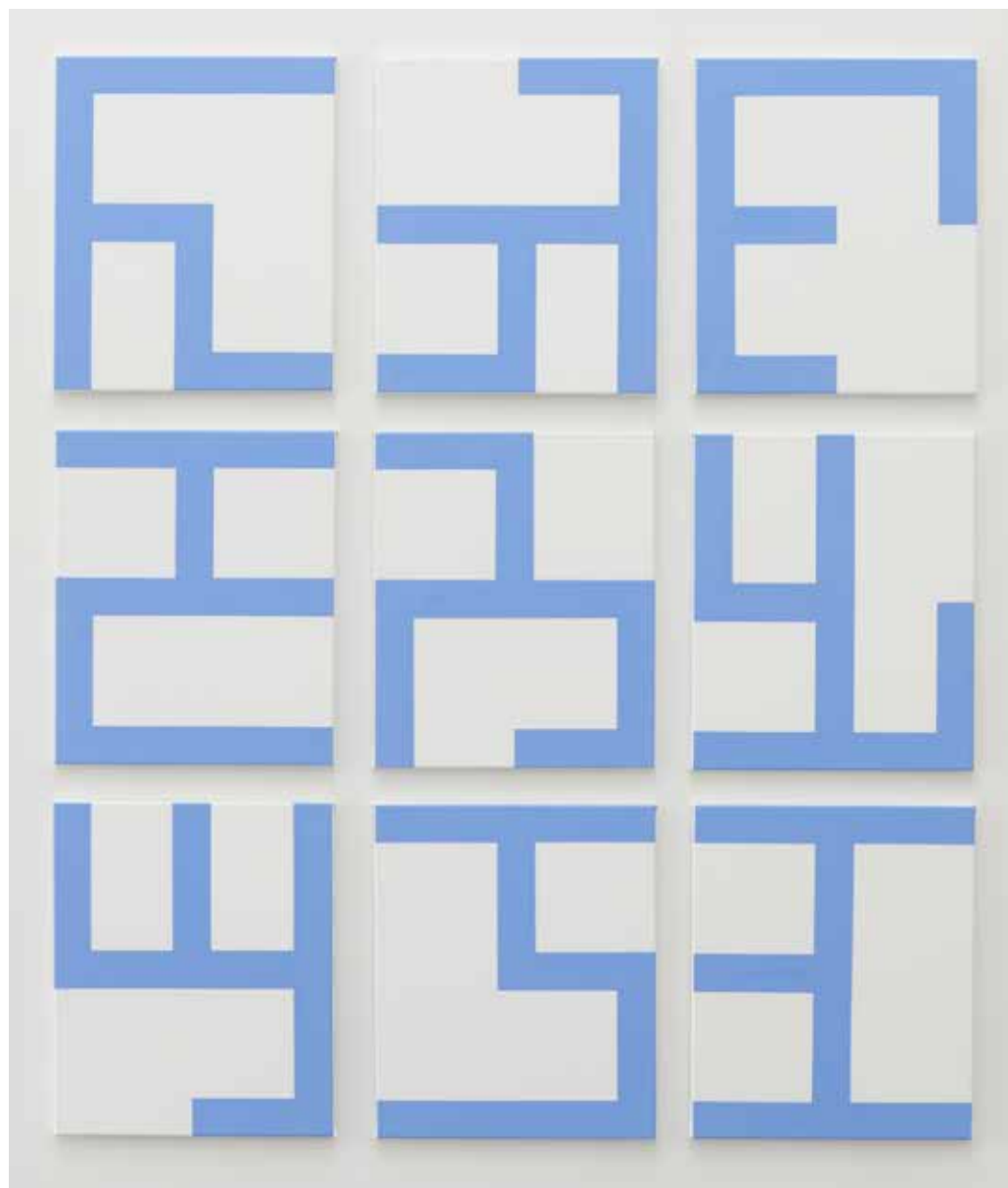
Eviter le pire (orange), 2014
vinyl on canvas
9 x (61 x 51) cm
unique



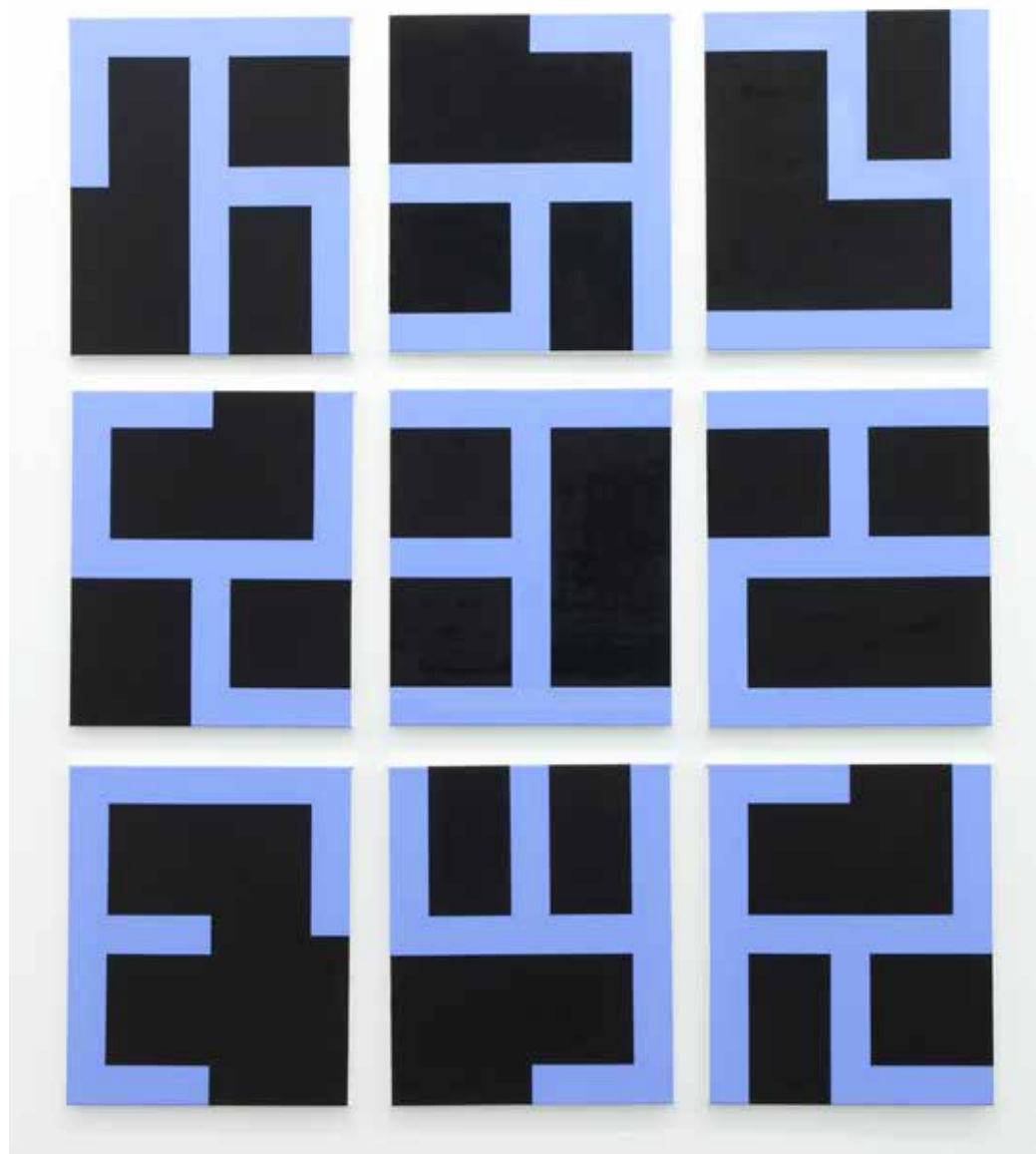
Eviter le pire (green), 2014
vinyl on canvas
9 x (61 x 51) cm
unique



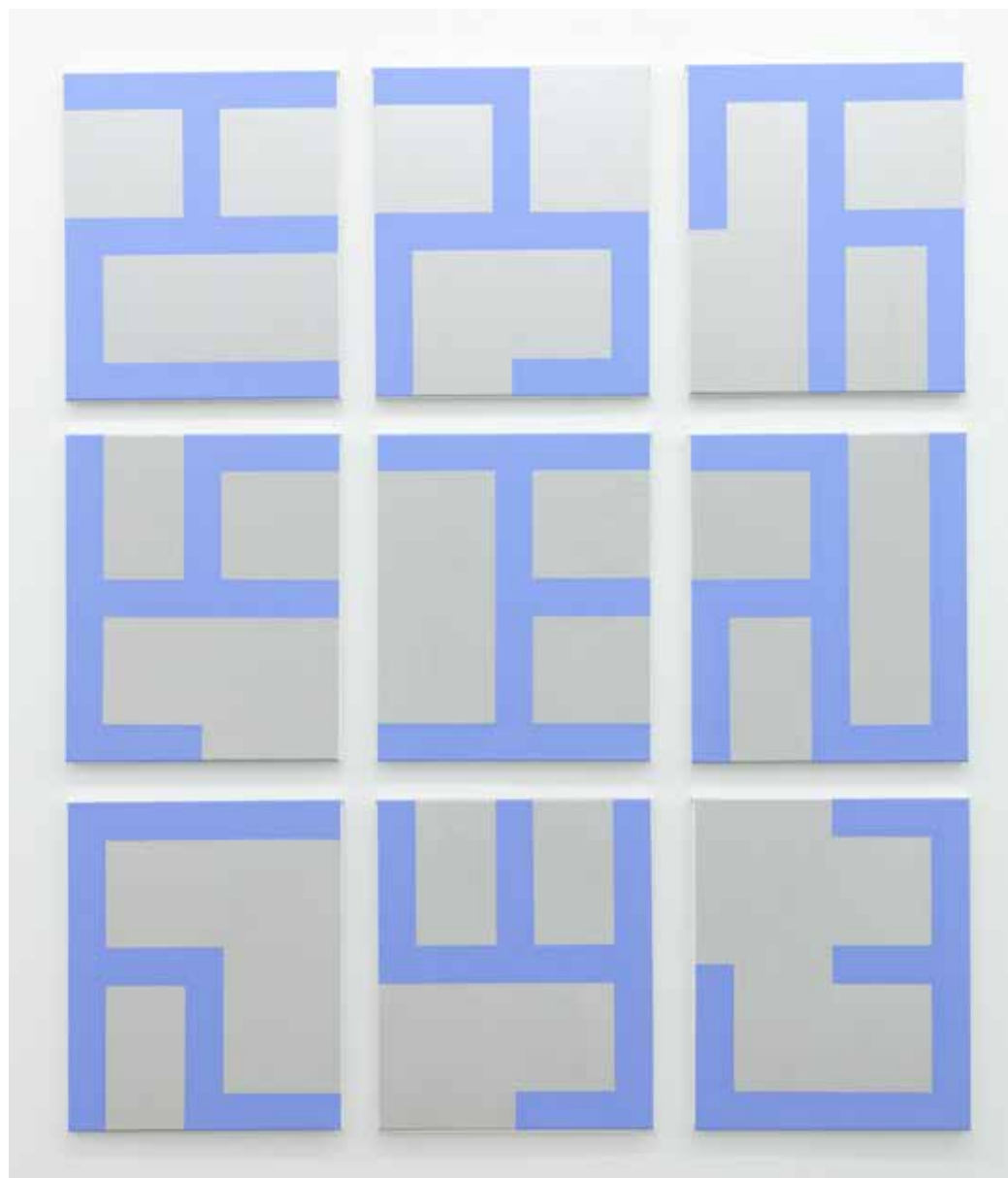
Eviter le pire (violet), 2014
vinyl on canvas
9 x (61 x 51) cm
unique



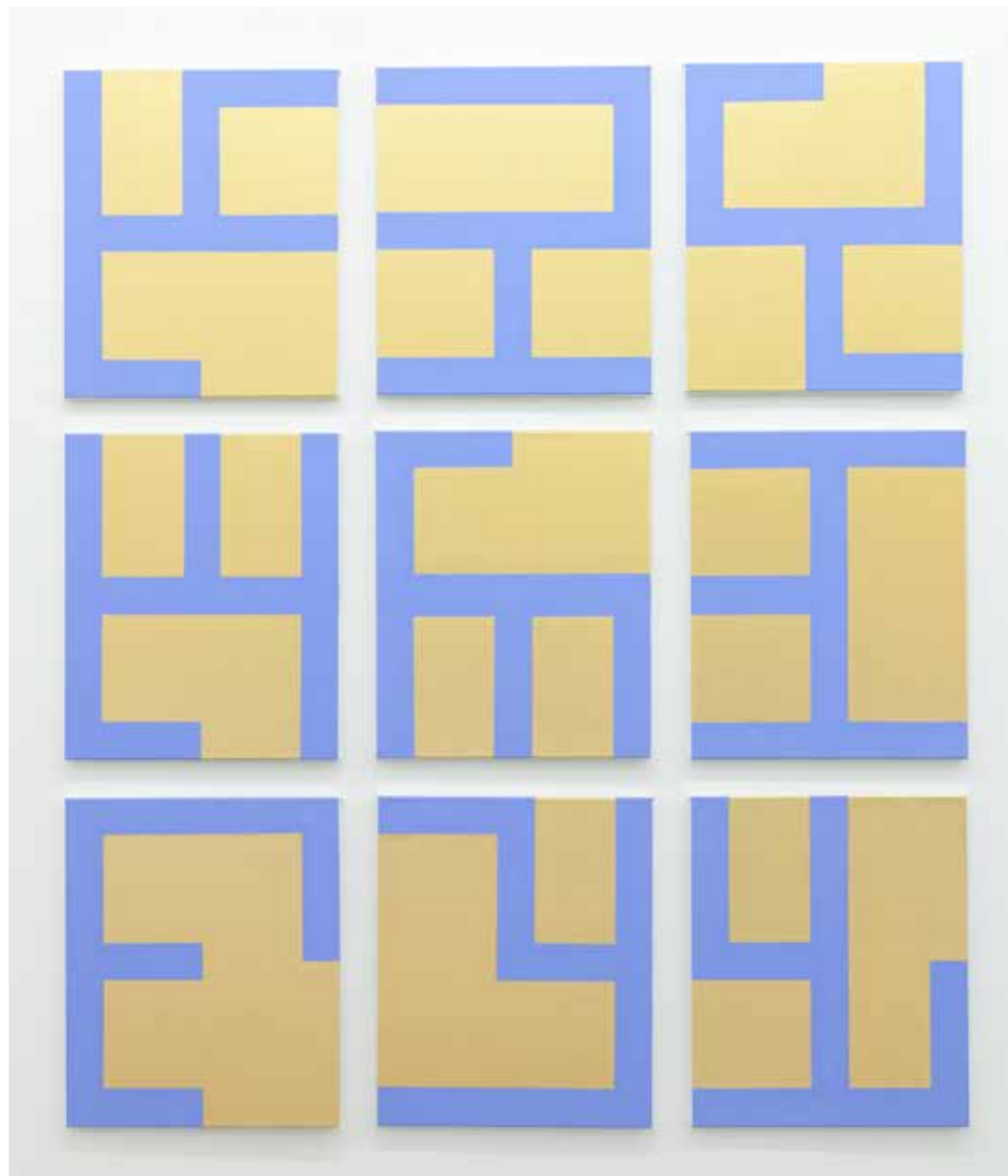
Eviter le pire (white), 2014
vinyl on canvas
9 x (61 x 51) cm
unique



Eviter le pire (black), 2014
vinyl & acrylic on canvas
9 x (61 x 51 cm)
unique



Eviter le pire (silver), 2014
vinyl & acrylic on canvas
9 x (61 x 51 cm)
unique



Eviter le pire (gold), 2014
vinyl & acrylic on canvas
9 x (61 x 51 cm)
unique



Eviter le pire (polychrome), 2014
vinyl & acrylic on canvas
9 x (61 x 51 cm)
unique

THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN



A strange thing happens when you look online for images of Philippe Van Snick's 'Eviter le Pire' series. Clicking on one of the thumbnails returned by the search, depicting a set of nine predominantly yellow paintings by Van Snick, an aesthetically soothing black backdrop comes to frame the image and optimise its radiant colours. To the right of this, the page also offers a grid of 'Related Images'. Each of these eight pictures features a yellow graphic design of some kind: there are logos for Forbes's Techonomy Conference and the 50th Inter IIT Sports Meet in Bombay, alongside Microsoft Office's cheery 'News' insignia and even Google Drive's triangular Möbius strip.

How can all these images be linked, when their meanings and purposes in the world, not to mention their appearances, are so radically different? If the flattened low-resolution shot of Van Snick's nine yellow canvases has been connected to the other images in this pool, it is only on the basis of a string of calculations, processed data and automated reasoning – and not because of an informed understanding of the work's visual qualities. The connection lacks subtlety, and the pictures are lumped together by a blind algorithm that values analysis over contemplation. Although these images may be 'related', they certainly don't share a heritage. Grouping them together is an example of the extreme systematisation that results when formulas are applied independently of real world experience. It's a phenomenon that results from a partial deductive reasoning, beginning with a theory and eschewing any actual observation.

This conception of images is the antithesis of the careful marriage of observation and rule-making that Van Snick's practice has performed since the late 1960s. His oeuvre has constituted an inductive process through which his observations about the world and his recognition of patterns in nature have been distilled into rule-governed practices and the use of specific terms. Over the years, he has returned to the ubiquitous condition of duality, signified by the number 2 and evident in the timeless alternation between day and night. Van Snick transmutes these into sky blue and black paint, colours that have woven their way through his oeuvre since 1984. Duality is also evident in his use of the terms A and B, which appear in multiple permutations in his 'Dix Papiers' (1975). These drawings explore the many possible relationships between two groups of ten dots, in which the two groups of dots are equivalent but distributed in different spatial arrangements. Van Snick says that 'numbers are how it all begins', and these are numbers chosen and processed by a person, an artist, who looks at the real world, rather than within the vacuum of a metal-encased machine.

The duality between A and B points to a wider dichotomy between reality and abstraction. It also signals the difference between an internal reality, which imposes an interpretative framework or conceptual grid on perceptions, and the way in which nature organises itself independently of our awareness of it. As Van Snick has pointed out, 'Two rapidly turn into a multiplicity.' Towards the end of the 1970s, Van Snick made the decision to work with a palette of just ten colours. For Van Snick, 'the number 10 is my work's internal motor', and he notates it as the sequence of ten individual units (0-9). He points out that 'It's not long before the combination of 2 and 10 (0-9) hints at the possibility of infinity'. The latest incarnation of Van Snick's ten-colour practice is the series 'Eviter le Pire' (2013-ongoing). Once it is completed, this series will consist of eleven sets of nine canvases, with one set in each of his ten colours and, to disrupt the neatness of his decimal project, an eleventh set featuring all ten colours in a particular combination. On the coloured backgrounds, Van Snick paints what he calls 'characters' in sky blue, a colour that reminds us of his attention to the cosmos and the relationship between abstraction and the real world.



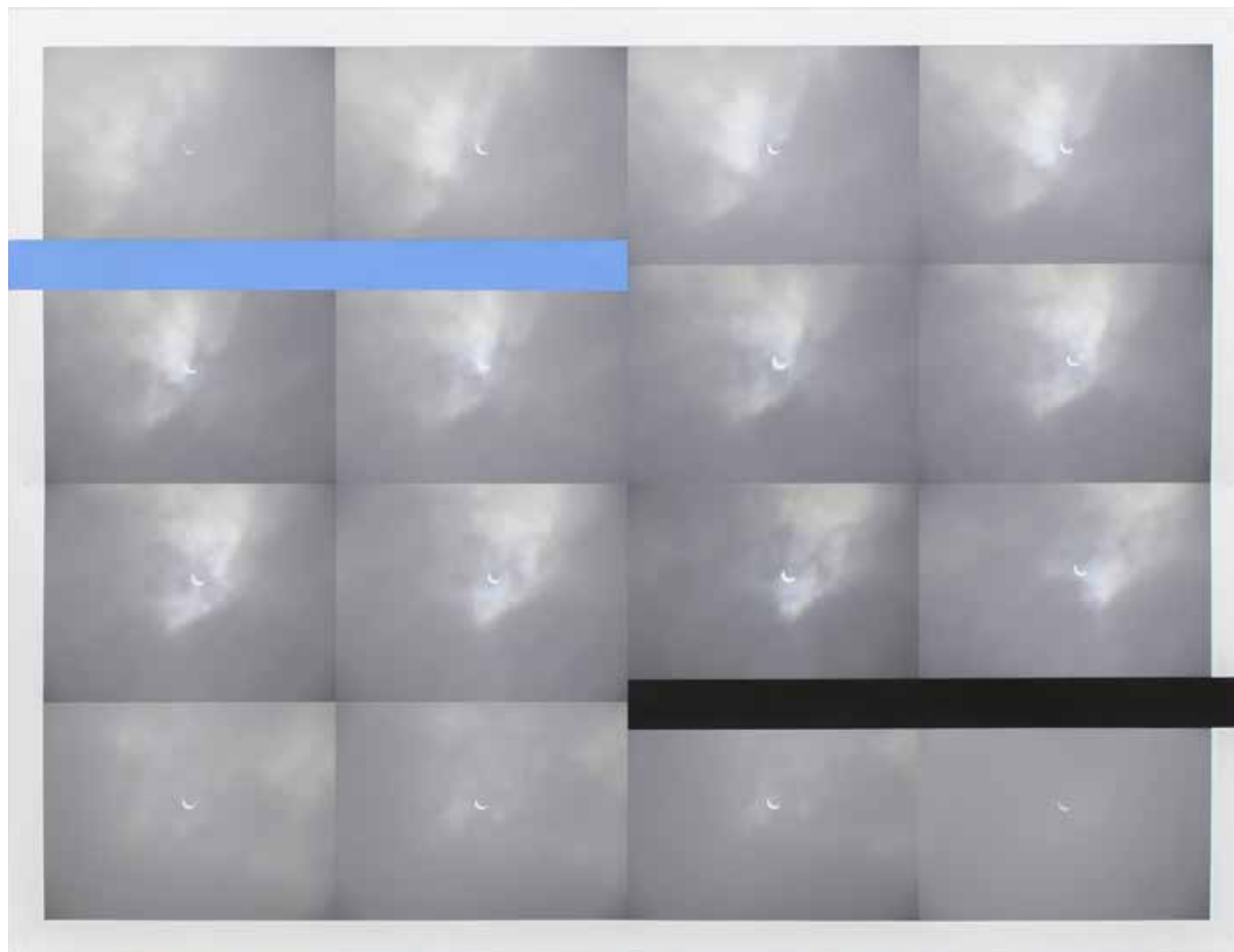
Van Snick arrived at these characters through an interest in Aztec culture, in particular undeciphered codices. His abstract shapes look somewhat like incomprehensible symbols that conjure up the notion of an alphabet but avoid any direct connection to a known language. Van Snick is conscious of the hazards of working with such graphic compositions, including the risk that they may be confused with familiar symbols such as religious or radical signs. His concern to avoid such a fate led him to the title of the series, 'Eviter le pire': 'To avoid the worst'. For Van Snick, the characters are 'a sort of prelanguage, unfixed, unsettled. It's like the language of paradise, in which words are not necessary.'

Van Snick's work extends beyond the edges of the canvas and into the space in which the works are shown. In the case of his first solo exhibition in London, he selected three colours with which to paint the walls of the gallery. His dual constants of sky blue and black – day and night – are accompanied by red, always the first colour Van Snick paints when he embarks on a series. This choice of colours marks the moment; it signifies a first and anchors his activities in the hustle and bustle of the real world.

And although Van Snick is committed to his own systems and processes when making work, he is not prescriptive of the ways in which the works ought to be viewed or interpreted. His canvases can be hung in a number of orientations, depending on their owner's critical or aesthetic appreciation and the mood in which they find themselves at that moment in time. As for Van Snick's ten colours, they 'don't invite a psychological or emotional reading, but that possibility is there for the viewer to experience it.'

The deceptive simplicity of Van Snick's practice reveals a decades-long commitment to a modest toolkit of numbers and colours, which the artist has combined and recombined in intricate and complex ways. 'Eviter le pire' is a meditation on our current times. Ideologies, faiths and tribal loyalties, signified by so many logos, acronyms and symbols, are manifested in the visual sphere. 'Eviter le pire', by bravely accepting that it could be mistaken for that which it critiques and avoids at all costs, treads a tightrope that snaps us back into an awareness of the manipulations at play in the world outside the gallery.

Ellen Mara De Wachter



Eclips, 20/03/2015
acrylic on pigment print, framed
130 x 150 cm
unique



Architectuur, 2007
cardboard, acrylic & vinyl
60 x 55 x 16 cm
unique



XX, 1993
2 bases, each with a stack of ten
canvases on cardboard
2 x (60 x 25 x 20 cm) &
10 x (25 x 20 cm)
unique



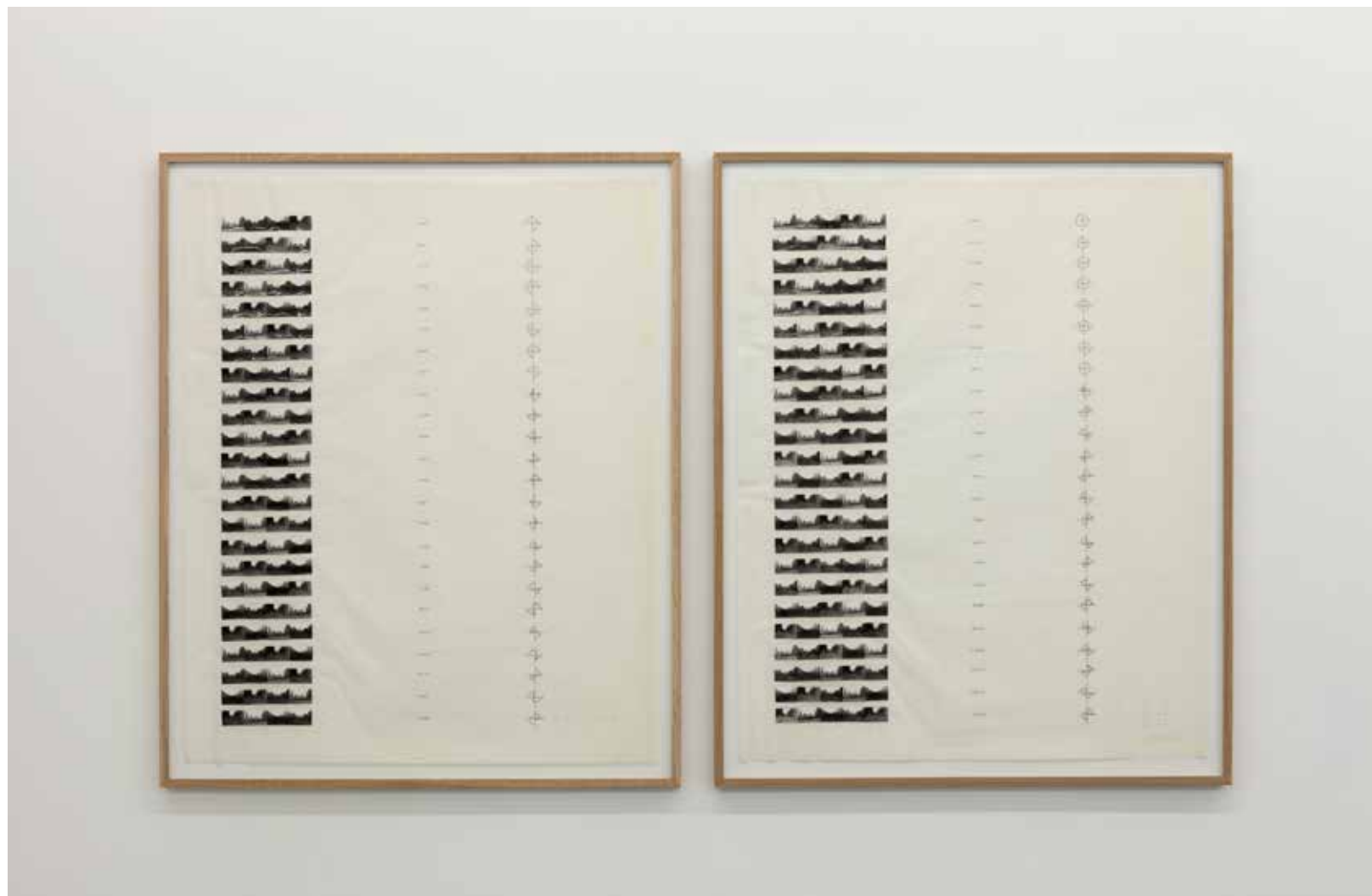
Symmetrische en Asymmetrische Dag
en Nacht reeks (blue), 1987-1989
acrylic and vinyl on canvas
8 pieces (2 Dag, 2 Nacht, 4 Blue)
variable dimensions
max. single piece, 20 x 90 cm,
max. size installation 350 x 500 cm
unique



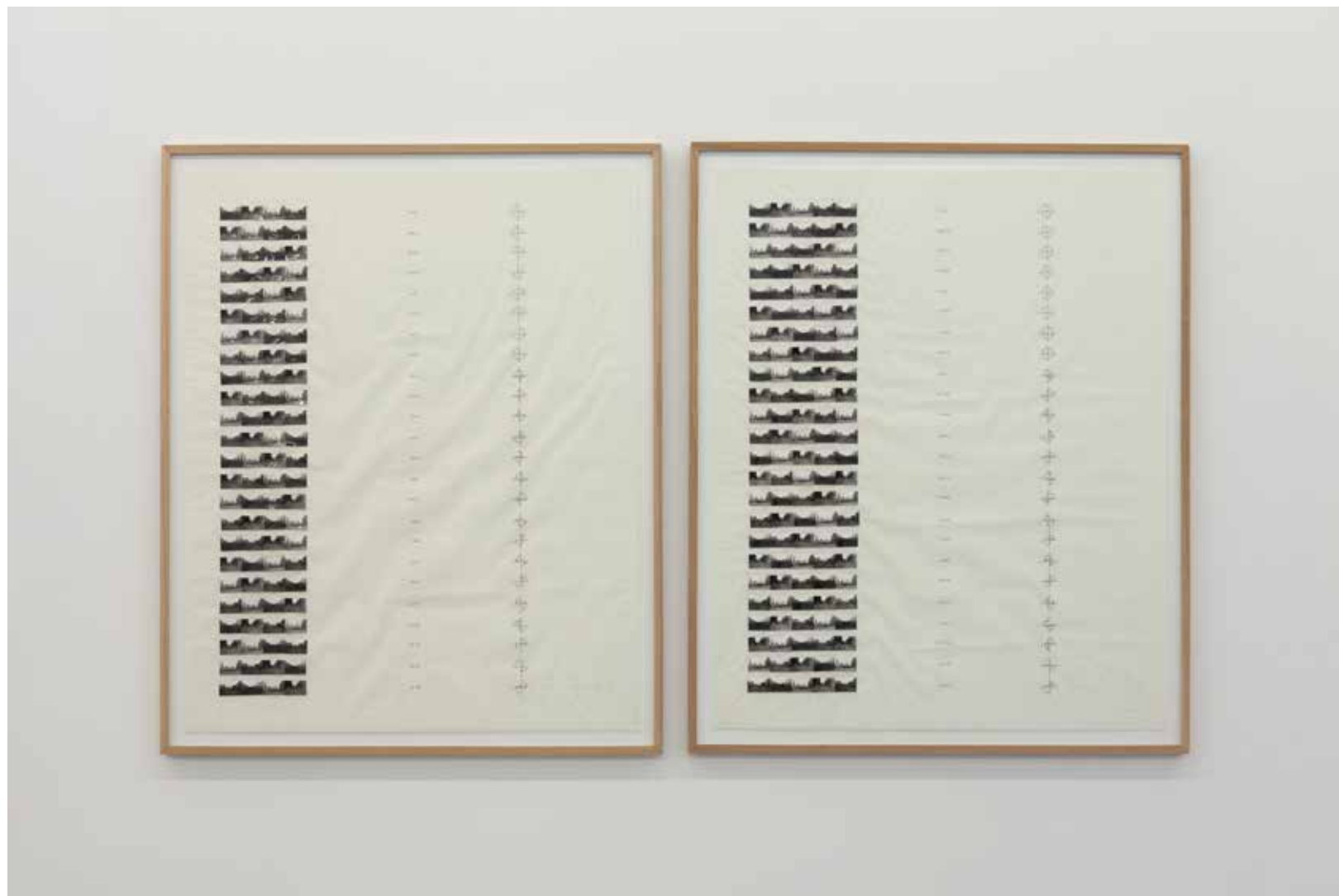
(0-9) Bogen, 1977
10 shapes in galvanized iron wire of
1 mm diameter
variable dimensions
(single wire approx. 35 x 15 cm,
installation, approx. 200 x 300 cm)
unique



Kruispunt, 1973
black-and-white photographs on
paper, notes in ink
2 x (103 x 48 cm)
framed



Kruispunt, 1973
black-and-white photographs on
paper, notes in ink
2 x (103 x 48 cm)
framed



Kruispunt, 1973
black-and-white photographs on
paper, notes in ink
2 x (78,5 x 97 cm)
framed



Kruispunt, 1972-73
black-and-white photographs on
paper, notes in ink
2 x (78,5 x 97 cm)
framed

EXHIBITION VIEWS













