

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE OPENING OF THE FIRST SOLO SHOW IN SWITZERLAND BY

TOM HACKNEY THE THOUGHT GAME

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, FROM 6 TO 8 PM

Exhibition: November 20, 2016, to January 22, 2017

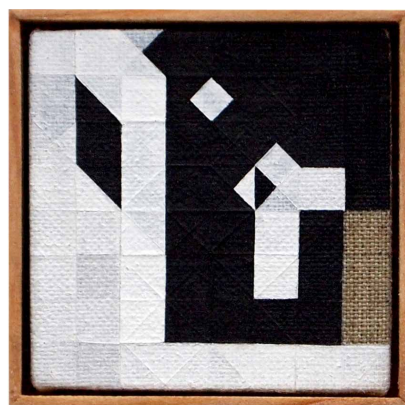
Opening times: 24/24, from Mondays to Sundays

KMD — KUNSTHALLE MARCEL DUCHAMP | THE FORESTAY MUSEUM OF ART

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Tom Hackney, *Chess Painting No. 54 bis (Michel vs. Duchamp, Strasbourg, 1924)*, 5.5 x 5.5 cm, gesso and acrylic on linen, 2016.



Tom Hackney, *Chess Painting No. 2 bis (Duchamp vs. Crépeaux, Nice, 1925)*, 4.2 x 4.2 cm, gesso on linen, 2016.

Essentially, Tom Hackney's *Chess Paintings*, which are based on the great chess games of Marcel Duchamp, make conceptual reference to two significant texts of the 20th century, one being Duchamp's famous 'preface' to *The Large Glass* (1915–1923), which he wrote on a slip of paper around 1915 and later, in 1934, published in the *Green Box*:

Preface

Given 1. the waterfall

2. the illuminating gas,

we shall determine the condition for the instantaneous State of Rest (or allegorical appearance) of a succession [of a group] of various facts seeming to necessitate each other under certain laws, in order to isolate the sign of the accordance between, on the one hand, this State of Rest (capable of all the innumerable (?) eccentricities) and, on the other, a choice of Possibilities authorized by these laws and also determining them.¹

It was through this poetical form of instruction that this great avant-garde artist sought to reflect, from an entirely new perspective, upon the then much discussed ideas of the Futurists on the visualization of 'moved' or 'moving' events.

The other text is Max Bill's precise and remarkable essay in the catalogue accompanying Marcel Duchamp's first solo exhibition in a public institution, which this famous Swiss artist curated himself in 1960 at the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zürich. In this essay, Max Bill seeks to interpret Duchamp's preface to *The Large Glass* in terms of his passion for chess and of all his other works created in the interstice between play, chance and precision:

"The involvement with presentation of movement led, by 1913, to the invention of a new kind of image-mechanics. This is burdened with thoughts of a literary symbolic kind, but also has a tendency to apply a kind of super-precision which thrusts across the geometric-mechanical reality into a meta-reality, where game and precision, idea and reality coincide." [In this regard it was] "not inessential for his development that he should occupy himself early on with chess; he got on so well that he represented

France in international matches and in 1932 published a book on finals together with Halberstadt. The boundary between meaning, logical consistency and play is the actual element that Duchamp adopted in art ... This collapsing of the thought game into artistic reality, this setting of rules of play, resulting in absence of play, this creation of open systems ... characterizes [his] work which becomes art even when the greatest risks are taken ...”²

It is precisely in this duality that we must indeed see Tom Hackney’s paintings. On the one hand they start out from Duchamp’s games of chess and, on the other, give a new, post-avant-garde dimension to the paintings of the Zürich Concrete artists around Max Bill and Richard Paul Lohse. Hackney subsequently endows Duchamp’s at once playful and seriously existential games of chess with a statically visual aspect—Duchamp would have called it an “ultra-rapid delay”³—by beginning “with an unprimed, stretched linen canvas, on which he draws a light grid in pencil. He then takes the moves from a preselected chess game and uses them to determine the placement of his painted forms by plotting the movements of the chessmen on the grid. The path of each move on the board is plotted, masked, and painted ... in sequence, from the opening move to the last. The width of the line representing each move is determined by the dimensions of the square; diagonal moves are wider than horizontal or vertical ones because diagonal moves derive from the hypotenuse of the square, while horizontal and vertical moves are the width of one side. The paths of the moves are painted in black or white gesso, a chalky painting material traditionally used to prepare or “prime” a surface (as it was the first or primary layer of paint) so that the successive layers of paint would adhere to it. While the black is opaque, and therefore conceals anything under the painted surface, the white gesso is translucent, and thus subtly reveals prior moves—the more saturated the whiteness of a painted area, the more passes it contains. Similarly, areas of gray result from regions in which the trail of white pieces have passed over those of black pieces, which hints at the potential value spectrum between white and black that is—much like the number of moves in the chess game—virtually limitless. The areas that are not traversed by any moves retain the taupe hue of the bare canvas, adding color to the otherwise achromatic design. Hackney followed the black-and-white canvases with more colorful designs, based not only on Duchamp’s games, but also on a unique proposal for a chess set that Duchamp first suggested in 1920. ... In this set, color signifies the moves of the queen, bishop, knight, and rook, while the kings and pawns remained the traditional black and white. The queens are colored a lighter and darker tint of green, as the potential movement of the piece encompasses the movements of both the rook and bishop, which are colored lighter and darker blues and yellows, respectively. The knight, whose distinctive path shares no characteristics with the other pieces, is colored in different values of red.”⁴

The artist has begun an additional series of works especially for his solo exhibition here at the KMD, including new sculptural pieces made specifically with the lower gallery in mind which—as Hackney describes—“feel like minimalist floor pieces—they bring to mind the ‘block alphabet’ quote by Duchamp about chess, and operate with the scale illusion in the lower space.”⁵ He also revisits an early variation of chess painting where “the moves are painted in pairs, from left to right”⁶. For the artist “the relativity of scale” has been “a key idea when thinking about chess: the game exists primarily as a structure comprising a small set of conditions. As an idea this structure has no mass or fixed scale. The material apparatus of chess—the image of the symbolic battlefield—is itself subject to a process of shrinkage and compression. The activity is not tied to a time or a location and can travel in the mind.”⁷

In other words, Tom Hackney’s works are directly related to Marcel Duchamp’s concept of the *instantaneous state of rest* but in a style of painting characteristic of the Zürich Concrete artists, not only giving the idea of ‘movement’ a new dimension but also embracing a fruitful reason for the appropriation or reanimation of abstract painting today.

NOTES:

¹ *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, a typographic version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp’s *Green Box*, translated by George Heard Hamilton, Edition Hansjörg Mayer, Stuttgart, London, Reykjavik, and Jaap Riekman Inc., New York 1976 (third edition), unpaginated.

² “Max Bill on Duchamp,” in *Studio International*, 189 (January-February 1975) pp. 26–27, p. 26; translated from the German by Gill Maddick from the text Max Bill, “Zu Marcel Duchamp,” in Marcel Duchamp, *Dokumentation über Marcel Duchamp* (exhibition catalogue), Kunstgewerbemuseum Zürich, pp. 5–11, pp. 7–8. Exhibition: June 30 to August 28, 1960.

³ *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, a typographic version, op. cit. (note 1).

⁴ Bradley Bailey, “Layered Meaning,” in Tom Hackney, *Corresponding Squares: Painting the Chess Games of Marcel Duchamp* (exhibition catalogue), World Chess Game Hall of Fame, St. Louis, MO, USA, pp. 5–11, p. 9. Exhibition: May 19 to September 11, 2016.

⁵ Tom Hackney in an e-mail to Stefan Banz, October 18, 2016.

⁶ Tom Hackney in an e-mail to Stefan Banz, October 21, 2016.

⁷ Tom Hackney in an e-mail to Stefan Banz, October 17, 2016.

TOM HACKNEY (b. 1977, UK) lives and works in London. He completed his Master of Fine Arts degree at Goldsmiths College, London, in 2008. Recent solo exhibitions include *Corresponding Squares: Painting the Chess Games of Marcel Duchamp*, Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, New York and World Chess Hall of Fame, Saint Louis (2016); *Minerals*, Ambacher Contemporary, Munich (2015); and *Tremors*, Breese Little, London (2013). His work is represented in public and private collections in Europe and the United States.