

BARCELONA

Pieter Vermeersch

PROJECTESD

Pieter Vermeersch's recent solo show in Barcelona came just over a year after another exhibition by him, held at Blueproject Foundation in the same city. In both cases, the Belgian artist added new elements to the existing architecture, providing a robust structural tangibility around which his reflections on light and color could unfold. This approach lent emphasis to the vaporous abstraction of the chromatic modulations on the walls and evinced a totalizing impulse that merged painting and architecture. A profoundly asymmetrical T-shaped white cinder-block structure in the middle of ProjecteSD made it impossible to perceive the room as a whole. Space seemed to fold into itself with great precision, but, paradoxically, part of the space was always obscured from view.



Pieter Vermeersch,
Untitled, 2017,
acrylic on stone,
47 ½ x 81 ½".

And yet, despite the lack of overview, it seemed difficult, if not pointless, to apprehend any one work individually and not as part of a tight whole. Some of the works were hung separately, seemingly asserting a world of their own, but nonetheless they also capitulated to the installation as an ensemble, functioning as punctuation in an overall reading of the space. On the left-hand side of the gallery—the layout suggested a clockwise path—hung *Untitled (C-Series)* (all works 2017), consisting of three big, red canvases that explore a subtle chromatic gradation. Two of them abutted each other, with the third separated from them by a pilaster. With these paintings, the artist directed our

gaze to the main wall, opposite the entrance, which had also been treated with a subtle gradation in color, shifting from the emptiness of white to a soft yellow that eventually became gold. The point where this yellow started to timidly manifest itself was marked by the vertical presence of a slab of stone, a material that has become crucial to Vermeersch's reflections on time and materiality. To make *Untitled*, this slab was subjected to a painterly intervention more drastic than the delicately shifting hues of the wall. One saw, following the vertical veining of the marble, a crude brushstroke sweeping downward and halting abruptly, as if to defy the natural intricacy of the surface through a brusque gesture—the vast temporality implied by the stone's veining counterpointed by the immediacy of a human action. This was a striking move, demonstrating the variable velocities of time at play in Vermeersch's work.

At the far end of the space, on the other side of the intrusive cinder-block structure, sat a pair of overlapping raw stone slabs on the stone bench of the gallery (also *Untitled*). They offered a common rhythm in their texture, with the diagonal of the outer slab coinciding with the veining of the one it partly covered, and a thin drawn line relating to the horizontal axis of the space. The millenarian connotations of stone confronted the preexisting architecture of the gallery, but Vermeersch lucidly merged the two with a stripe of paint that seemed to fix the stone to the wall. Its own color shifted from gray to silver until, having reached its full intensity, this silver then met the gold of the adjacent wall, where the two metallic colors collided with utmost force. In what I would consider one of his greatest accomplishments to date, Vermeersch highlighted the autonomy of color while paradoxically subordinating it to his engagement with the specificity of the space.