



# ARTFORUM

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Warren Neidich  
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Warren Neidich's recent solo show in Berlin, "Each Rainbow Must Retain the Chromatic Signature, it..." comprised a triad of painting, sculpture, and installation that playfully pointed out the conditions of perceptions and the way it can be manipulated and controlled. The exhibition included "Rainbow Brushes," 2007-2008, a series of nine oversize paintbrushes that each feature a different sequence of colors, all taken from famous paintings throughout European art history. Neidich places the matching pigment on a piece of paper laid flat on the ground, then pulls a brush through, leaving traces of color on the bristles like an afterimage. *After Peter Paul Rubens 1636*, 2007, is based on the rainbow found in Ruben's 1636 painting *Rainbow Landscape*. Filled with browns and vibrant turquoise, the brush's colors are quite different from those of the typical rainbow. According to the laws of optics, a rainbow consists of colors that

follow one another in a fixed order. Neidich, on the other hand, presented a wide range of variations on this order drawn from various epochs of art history, so that the changing cultural and empirical conditions they represent are "made visible" in retrospect.

Neidich went on to challenge the viewer with concentration exercises that begin where Jasper Johns leaves off: In *Red-White-Blue*, 2007-2008, three canvases each display the name of a color, written in neon tubing whose hues contradict the names that they are spelling out: Green neon read WHITE, red neon BLUE, and the blue neon RED. The work alludes to the Stroop test for attention deficit disorder, perhaps leading us to wonder how bad it is if, confronted with this contradictory perceptual information, we read and even perceive the blue as red for a good two sec-

onds: too long? The last work on display was *Infinite Regress*, 2008, a large pavilion with automatic sliding glass doors that are each tinted a primary color. The movement of the visitors cause these colored panes to overlap, forming secondary mixtures of violet, green, and orange.

Plato noted with disapproval that artists tend to favor appearance over essence. Pliny, too, consid-



**Warren Neidich, *After John Everett Millais 1856*, 2008**, paint brush with acrylic paint, 14 x 15". From the series "Rainbow Brushes," 2007-2008.

ered illusion one art's defining characteristics. According to his famous account of the contest between two Greek painters of the fifth century BC, Zeuxis painted grapes so realistic that birds flew up to peck at them, but Parrhasios outdid his opponent with a picture of a curtain. Zeuxis impatiently demanded that Parrhasios pull back the curtain to show him the picture-Zeuxis has fooled the birds, but Parrhasios fooled Zeuxis. Descartes's distrust of sensory perception prompted him to find certainty in thought

alone. Since ancient times, thinkers have viewed art as inferior to rational knowledge, but Nietzsche inverted the hierarchy: Knowledge itself is an illusion, he argued, and art acknowledges its own illusory nature.

Neidich's playfulness in approaching visual "apparatuses" gives the viewer an active role in producing the illusion. These pieces lead the viewer to test out the different positions in the room; it is in these interstices of self-observance that the show's power emerged. Neidich works his way through various forms in which our senses are manipulated and culturally coded, challenging us to rethink our ideas about color in art.

-Adina Popescu

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.