

MARTOS GALLERY

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Nicolas Roggy
HOW TO REPAIR

OPENING THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10TH, 6 - 8 PM

October 10 - November 9, 2024

Martos Gallery is pleased to present *How To Repair*, an exhibition featuring new works by the Paris-based artist Nicolas Roggy. These paintings exemplify a lively interplay of pictorial, architectural, and sculptural forms, rooted in a foundational exploration of color, composition, and material.

Roggy's practice involves a meticulous approach to drawing, collage, and construction, to build and deconstruct the various physical elements of each painting. He employs techniques of addition and subtraction systematically to achieve chromatic, surface contrast and flow, often enhanced through cutting and sanding.

Roggy's deliberate repetition of formats and motifs engages circularity and anthropomorphism, as well as the perception of depth and space, moving beyond mere representation to explore hybrid picture-making. His works are equally paintings and objects, built as images and structure. As Roggy has observed, these works amplify the potential of object-type painting to the wall, to the architecture and the volume of the room, both inviting and implicating the viewer's own projection: bodies at rest and in motion.

Accompanying the exhibition is *Painting-As-Puzzle*, an in-depth conversation between Nicolas Roggy and writer and curator Bob Nickas, offering myriad insights into the conceptive and intuitive nature of Roggy's vision.

Nicolas Roggy

Painting-As-Puzzle ... Architectural, Pictorial, Sculptural

BN: Is there a starting point for each painting? A first step? I know that you make drawings to plan out the internal shapes and profile of the support, so you have a sort of map to follow.

NR: The first step for a show, as you say, are the drawings. Not only as the *esquisse* of the project ...

BN: The sketch.

NR: Yes. But also a dialogue with it, starting with some free lines that inspire me in some way to continue. I make drawings in large scale on squared paper.

BN: I remember seeing gridded sheets in your studio when I was there in June. The grid, for you, is like a scaffolding on which something will be constructed.

NR: Right. The drawing gives me a sense of scale to build a painting, to make it “real,” with measurements and proportions. This notion of reality is mixed with a psychedelic aspect, the in-between state of the drawing where all the lines, scratches, and accidents could be represented by paint, or can become part of the structure, establishing the form.

BN: Even with a plan before you begin, there’s an element of chance in terms of the rendering, and anything, even mistakes which may be erased or left half visible as traces, can become part of the image.

NR: And I can decide which will be separate elements and which will be linked as I'm painting, as I go along and respond to previous gestures.

BN: You can change your mind. Because what looks like two panels in a drawing might, in fact, become two connected pieces in the final work, or you might have painted one shape alongside another. Elements are fitted together physically and pictorially and, with color and contrast, illusionistically.

NR: The potential of the drawings as a project is not really limited, even if I draw with the idea of repeating my technique to build the format. Mixing a collage of transparent patterns, paint, markers, and stencils allows a vocabulary to identify the subject.

BN: At times, I do think of your paintings as collages. This might explain the fractured energy in some of the work. *Seul à table*, for example, with its jagged points poking out of and down from the picture plane. They may seem wrong to some viewers, certainly to a formalist, but without them the painting wouldn't work. Something that came out of a No Wave philosophy was: "Do the wrong thing." It might have been Arto Lindsay who said that. At the time he was playing guitar in DNA, one of the greatest purveyors of angular, visceral minimalism, and his singing was more a matter of short yelps, a sort of vocal punctuation. In your paintings, there can be a similar visual punctuation. Arto also played in the Lounge Lizards, who were self-described as "car crash jazz." I think "doing the wrong thing" is one aspect of your artistic DNA.

This leads me to another question. Although you are a painter, there is often a sculpted aspect to your work. Can you speak about that? *Stupid As the Sun* seems to present an image of a sculptural object. It might be an alien tripod or protractor. *Soft News* is almost three-dimensional. Those points at the bottom of

Seul à Table might suggest flattened table legs. In all of them, I can see you sitting there by yourself in the studio, figuring out the picture.

NR: I paint with the idea to build an image of a painting with a lot of strata, layers, using tools as you would on a house—a sander, a grinder, a plastering knife. I construct the forms and the structure in balance with how the painting will be on stage. In these new paintings, I used a brush much more than before, which was a new step in my work. But I used it like a tool to identify more clearly the painting, or the role of the painting.

BN: All of us will see a painting. You see it, or describe it, as an image of a painting. That's a big difference. And you see it "on stage," and having a role to play. Your paintings do appear to perform—the paintings with various elements, in particular. They might be read as stage sets with props and actors. The theater of painting.

Besides the work being more painterly, with more brushwork than before—while the support remains aluminum panels—other things feel new in these works.

NR: There is more cutting, puzzle part shapes that reveal the relation I have with the idea of painting, or more precisely the presence of a painting. The works could be seen as sculptures because they use the potentiality of projection off the wall, relating to the architecture of the room. I make objects whose subject is painting. I also hope to reveal a sense of the projection on the part of the viewer, on their existence, their body, head, and mind. The painting is almost a mirror. *Locked Clock* could be a 2-D cartoon-like representation of the influence of the painting on the viewer, like a circular way the eye—the white triangular form on the left—is looking to the blank surface on the right, the monochrome pink area. With this painting, the aluminum bars are

painted differently on the side. This changes the three-dimensional aspect as the viewer moves back and forth.

My paintings are made with tools and represent the tools that I've used. I play with the shapes that I use to build the format: spikes, tongs, hooks, a wrench. Some of the shapes are inspired by the design part, like handles.

BN: The large black element that visually frames the left side of *How To Repair*, does, in fact, look like a combination wrench and Swiss Army knife, partially opened. The title seems to perfectly encapsulate your approach. Often, I have the feeling that elements that were brought together were taken apart and reassembled. Constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed. *How To Repair !!!* The title not only tells us what you do, but suggests a philosophical position. There's the old expression: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Maybe for you painting is somehow broken. That may be the wrong word, but so much painting today has been reduced to poster-type illustration, flat, one-dimensional images without any object-integrity. Without any guts. Not challenging the viewer because the artists don't challenge themselves. But you do.

NR: Experimentation is the way to challenge myself about how to paint, and to face the omnipresent problem of being painter, when to stop ...

BN: That was a major point for monochrome painters, or radical painters: When is a painting finished?

NR: I also ask, What does painting contribute to transforming an object? The representation of functionality helps me to project an idea of how painting could be functional, and echoes how a painting could be a sculptural, hybrid object. The first step to put my drawings in "form" is to cut following the lines, then to build the contour by making hundreds of cuts in the aluminum profiles. The

more round the shapes are, the more I need to make “teeth” in the profile to flex it.

Stupid As the Sun seems to present an image of a sculptural object, as you say, but it’s also a bas relief of a drawing I made. Behind what looks like a “sculpture” at the center, there are three painting representations, two side-by-side at the top, and a cut box at the bottom left. I see them as three scenes in different moments, and the red lines at the edges could be the minute marks on the face of a clock. The sculptural form in dark red made by lines and dots comes forward on this ground. These three scenes are not so much a *mise en abyme* as they reinforce the relation of the foreground and the background as the structure’s potentiality, the painting’s skin. Two and three dimensions in the same painting allows me suggest a representation of a sculpture and a representation of a painting, each influencing the other.

BN: Do you consider the work of certain sculptors, as much as other painters? Which artists are important to you?

NR: Earlier influences would be Lee Lozano and Lee Bontecou, from tools to two-dimensional work. We can also look at artists who make objects—or work with them— through the prism of painting. A Haim Steinbach shelf piece could be a perfect painting in the sense of a representation of an era.

BN: Or pictorially. I know his work well, and it never occurred to me to think of his presentation of objects on a shelf in relation to a picture, a classic Morandi painting, in particular, and Dutch *vanitas* in general.

NR: I was surprised to see in Steinbach’s retrospective that his first black paintings are framed by color charts. More recently there is his Pantone series. I am also interested in John Divola's

Zuma photos, how they are charged through his sculptural, architectural approach to wall painting. I'm interested by how paint can impose a direction for a sculptural work, the way that Paul Thek painted his sculptures, *Bird and Shoes* and *Box with Butterfly*. I think about Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Robert Gober, and Richard Artschwager's use of color in domestic space.

I'm influenced by artists who reveal more than a practice, but a desire to question the representation by materiality, like when I read Paul Sharits discussing color.

BN: Sharits, an experimental filmmaker—illuminated, flickering color.

NR: I also discovered Lewis Stein's series of mirror paintings, and I've looked closely at Adrian Piper's *Drawings about Paper and Writings about Words*.

BN: A great series from '67. With shading and contrast, using simple materials, graphite and charcoal, she creates a believable illusion of depth on a flat surface.

NR: Maybe I sculpt about paintings ... that I can't write with words.

BN: I wouldn't have thought of this series of Adrian Piper's if you hadn't mentioned it just now. But knowing, and having shown, paintings of yours from eight and ten years ago, what you call the *paravents*, the "screens" that bent and folded off of themselves and the wall, I see now that you're interested in how to create spatial depth on a flat painted surface. *What's the problem with me, you?* has at the right what might be a large open door of an armoire, although it's flat to the rest of the surface. And although this title might at first seem to identify the artist and address the viewer, what if the "you" is painting? What's wrong with painting? I

think of art as primarily a matter of problem solving, and art is a good problem to solve. What were your motivations and concerns for this show?

NR: As I feel more comfortable building the format of the paintings, I sometimes imagine my brain split, the left brain to build and the right brain to paint.

BN: Balance can always be found in contradiction—what Lou Reed identified as the space between thought and expression. Some parts of your paintings are lyrical, others are noisy. Some are aggressive, others recede. This might all occur in the same painting!

NR: There is in general a confrontation with anthropomorphic and mechanical forms to satisfy for me a sense of balance and turbulence. I need to feel that I am analyzing my practice at the same time as my feelings. Maybe this is romantic, but you know that there are times when noise music alternates psychedelic drones and industrial sound. Music in general can offer a good parallel to my work in terms of sampling, sequencing, harmonizing, and dissonance. Feedback and echo: echoing in the repetition of the forms and feedback to reveal the matter differently.

The works in this show are precise. The painting shapes are descriptions of my relation with the way to paint. I have in the past had a bad surprise when I saw how the structural parts were good but they didn't leave me enough room to paint.

BN: So you had to plan for those areas in advance.

NR: To some degree. The cogs and “teeth” of the structure are made by contours and negative contours, which are done by hand. What interested me is the differences of form and “contra

form,” the interstices and gaps that are part of the overall composition. Also for this show I kept in mind the gallery space itself, which has columns and painted pipes.

BN: A fire engine red pipe up to the ceiling, and across its width, and bright yellow and dark green coloration on the beautiful old columns, kept as they were found.

NR: When I look at this series, I chose and placed color as if it was punctuation, like in *How To Repair*. I had to maintain the yellow rounded forms as subjects, and to have these subjects in three different states which you might identify as a gauntlet, a head, and a bulb. I made many tests to decide how I would treat the rest of the surface, not adding too much color, to preserve the yellow points.

BN: That panting went through many changes.

NR: In the end I reworked the surface three times in black and white with different repetitive gestures, masked by the transparent tape, with raised bands cut by hand, and sanding. At a certain point I felt to be writing a novel, superimposing different moments, textures.

BN: *Seul à Table*, as I mentioned, could have been collaged. Can you talk about the collages you make towards establishing the structure and composition?

NR: When I make the first drawings, I use old Letraset patterns, the kind from '80s architecture and illustration which I can transfer to a surface to know how and where I need to add pattern in the paintings. These are like filters to fake shadows, to give a sculptural form or movement ...

BN: The optical patterning you worked with in the beginning.

NR: Right. It's a tool for me to define the object I want to create. Patterns are an apparatus of the entire machinery. The technique of collage supports the idea of the cutting and the sequenced appearance of the image, which allows me to situate the dialogue between surface and representation. That confrontation. The pattern may look like a past aesthetic, but honestly I don't care where this would place my painting in the history of art, between Op and anything else.

BN: You're more interested in heightened perception than in retinal tricks. The larger paintings are in human scale, reflecting a standing viewer in the room, while the smaller ones relate to the human head. How are you planning to install the show?

NR: It's important to me that the paintings are in the same room, to surround the viewer. All the paintings approach a different aspect of my practice, but each painting also completes the others.

BN: Each painting is a puzzle that you have assembled piece by piece, even if at times the pieces appear to have been made to fit where they shouldn't have. And the show itself is a larger puzzle in an actual space occupied by the viewer.

NR: I imagine that the best way to see it would be on rotating chair.