

REVIEWS NEW YORK

Olivier Mosset

Martos Gallery | New York

By Jan Avgikos



View of “Olivier Mosset: Drive-In,” 2025. From left: *LAST RUN AT MONTRIOND 14*, 2004; *Untitled*, 1979; *El Camino*, 1964. Photo: Steven Probert.

Olivier Mosset’s exhibition here, “Drive-In,” presented five elements, four of which were grouped into one ensemble: a short film titled *LAST RUN AT MONTRIOND 14*, 2004, featuring a muscle car, ostensibly parked in a small art space, with its engine revving in preparation for a burn-out stunt performance; *Untitled*, 1979, a pale-green monochrome canvas whose lustrous shade was

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inspired by a bird's-eye view of the waters around Belize; bench, 2024, a basic steel bench finished with automotive-grade white paint; and El Camino, 1964—indeed, the titular Chevrolet model, with keys in the ignition—which Mosset covered with a flat-gray primer and used as his all-purpose utility coupe to drive around Tucson. The Swiss expat/ex-Parisian/ex-New Yorker has lived there since 1996.

Mosset has long had a fondness for exhibiting his own collection of motorcycles, both stock and customized—as well as the occasional tricked-out vintage vehicle—in tandem with his geometric and/or monochrome paintings, which have been the basis of his practice since the late 1970s. The installations are crafted on the presumption of an affinity between two very unlikely objects and, by extension, two different kinds of audiences—art lovers and motorheads. No matter one's affiliation, Mosset's brand of Conceptualism invites the viewer to unravel the tangle of associations posited between a painting and a car.

It might be that the most expedient route to resolving this conundrum is through autobiography—which can be a factor without being exactly the point of the work. The artist's experience is front and center in this respect, as we might well imagine him in his El Camino, which exudes a cool Western vibe, cruising around dusty Tucson. That vision would seem to be about as far away as one can get, culturally speaking, from European modernism and the theoretical underpinnings of high abstraction. Unlike Gabriel Orozco's cut-up and reassembled Citroën (La DS, 1993); or the luxury vehicle Sarah Lucas sliced in half and covered in crisp, clean Marlboro cigarettes (This Jaguar's Going to Heaven, 2018); or Martin Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen's oatmeal-covered Ford Capri (Capri by Night, 1982), Mosset's Chevy didn't appear especially transformed. Perhaps it was just temporarily parked in the gallery, ready to hit the road once more after the exhibition closed.

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And what can be said of the monochrome in this setting but that it, too, was a kind of vintage vehicle with, apparently, unlimited mileage. Nonetheless, it still managed to affect perception, for in its presence we saw the El Camino and the steel bench, respectively, as black and white monochromes. Mosset's proper paintings—the ones that hang on walls—reflect the conditions of their production. They are indexed to the place and time of their making: the utilitarian simplicity of commercial shops and studios, the materials of automotive and construction suppliers, and the random aesthetic cues extracted from nondescript details of everyday life.

Over the decades, Mosset's sensibility has remained consistent, striking notes on registers of beauty and grunge, as exemplified by *Drive-In, 2024*—a duo-tone, two-panel polyurethane monochrome made from honeycomb aluminum—which was the star of the exhibition. Displayed in its own showroom with a glass wall facing gritty, busy Elizabeth Street in Chinatown, it went both high and low. The luminous surface of the upper panel is a shiny, luscious shade of red that is reflective and fuels kinetic appeal. The lower panel, in dark blue, shimmers with color that appears to change hue depending on one's angle. The work was deeply responsive to the buzzing chaotic rumble of the street, as if it belonged out there with all the crafted surfaces and special effects of vernacular culture, from custom cars and shop signs to bedazzled acrylic fingernails. But it is equally rooted in the historical avant-garde and the hierarchies of form that remain the bedrock of the institutions, shared languages, and intellectual traditions of art—and in that cosmopolitan overlay, there is great virtue.