

## **OLIVIER MOSSET**

### *PLAN B*

October 23 - December 18, 2015

Opening October 23, 2015 6-8PM

The work of Olivier Mosset (b. 1944, Bern Switzerland) has been presented in museums, galleries and institutions since the 1960s. For a brief period he was associated with BMPT (Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni), an informal association forged in 1966 with Daniel Buren, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni. The four artists publicly expressed their desire to challenge institutional structures of authorship through five acts that took place throughout the year of 1967. The assertion behind BMPT was a need for a radical break from dominant painting (ie. Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel) with an urgency to recalibrate painting, a return to degree zero. Among the five acts of BMPT, the fourth manifestation took place at Galerie J.(Paris). Without Parmentier, the group's associative activity and collaboration ended. The remaining three artists declared authorship over each other's work, claiming, "Today each of us will sign the paintings of the two others and his own, signing all three with his own name." Mosset signs the works of Buren and Toroni those of Buren and Mosset and Buren those of Toroni and Mosset. This signal to disrupt the commodity status of the art object has filtered through Mosset's project to the present day.

Before his association with BMPT, Mosset was a teenage runaway. He left Switzerland for Paris in 1963 and began working for artist Jean Tinguely. He is introduced to Niki de Saint Phalle, Daniel Spoerri, André Breton, Ben Vautier, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Alain Jouffroy and Marcel Duchamp and, in 1964, paints two canvases that seem to paradoxically summarize his attitude towards painting at the time. On one canvas, Mosset paints the words "THE END" and on the other "RIP." In both cases, an end indicates a beginning and termination becomes a means of commencement.

From this point onward, Mosset's work prioritizes neutrality, anonymity and objectivity over specificity, referentiality, temporality and aesthetics. He begins to reduce linguistic characters to more ambiguous yet simplified forms, finishing his first circle painting in 1966. In Paris, he systematically paints a single black circle centered on a white ground, producing one canvas after the next repeatedly until abruptly stopping in 1974. Throughout the eight years he made the same painting roughly two hundred times over. As an archetype of neutrality, the cyclic form seems uniquely poised for this kind of repetitive, almost reflexive, action. "To the perpetual motion of the production of signs he responded with repetitiveness, resistance to change and the reiteration of flawlessly concerted acts, the outcomes being the production of a picture identical to itself, although multiple and, one sensed already, destined to undergo appreciable changes due to the imponderables of conservation."<sup>1</sup> Mosset describes the circle as "something that's there and exists, and could just as easily been made by someone else."<sup>2</sup>

By 1974, the circle has become Mosset's signature motif. Yet, he directs his attention to Buren's stripe paintings, appropriating the stripe pattern for himself. Though Mosset's approach to the stripe greatly differed from Buren's, he was nevertheless furious after seeing Mosset's "stripe paintings" in his studio. In spite of this, Mosset's stripe paintings were shown by Daniel Templon the same year and fake invitations labelled "Homage to Daniel Buren" were sent out, furthering public confusion and - perhaps - Buren's bitterness. For Mosset, "If the paintings seemed to appropriate Buren's visual device...they brought forth the question of the signature linked to the use of this device, as well as a questioning of the relationship between background and foreground."<sup>3</sup> This question of background and foreground and their mutual conflation eventually led Mosset to adopt an increasingly monochromatic format—a return to the end, perhaps. Starting with a single color on a white ground or a white stripe painted over a color ground, the stripes eventually transitioned to white on off-white grounds then finally white on white stripes. This leads Mosset to dedicate himself to the monochrome format, which has remained his primary focus for the last three decades.

1. Catherine Perret, *Olivier Mosset: Painting, Even* (Les presses du réel, 2013), p. 29.

2. Conversation between Olivier Mosset and John Armleder. *John Armleder, Helmut Federle, Olivier Mosset, Ecrits et entretiens*, (Grenoble and Saint-Etienne, 1986), p. 253.

3. Olivier Mosset, *Olivier Mosset, Works 1966-2003* (Editions 5 Continents, Milan, 2003), p. 129.

Moving to New York in 1977, Mosset entered a context dominated by figuration, expressionism and Pop. Yet, he remained committed to the monochrome. For the Paris Biennale that year, he produced a red monochrome scaled to the exact dimensions of the gallery wall, going unnoticed and considered by many to be the gallery wall itself. In 1990, he exhibited in the Swiss Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. On numerous occasions, Mosset collaborated with many notable artists: Andy Warhol and Steven Parrino at the Pierre Huber Gallery in Geneva in 1990; with John Armleder, who invited him to present a skateboard ramp at the Lyon Biennale in 1993; and with Cady Noland at the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art in Zurich 1999. In 1994, in the Sion Museum of Fine Art, he designed an installation made of cardboard that echoed the shape of the anti-tank barriers familiarly called Toblerones by the Swiss during the Second World War. In 2003, Oliver Mosset presented a two-fold retrospective at the Museum of Fine Art in Lausanne and at the Art Museum St. Gallen.

In 2007, Mosset begins to make paintings with Rhino Lining, a polyurethane spray used to protect truck beds. Absent of gesture, the mechanized textured surfaces recall the appropriationist mindset interwoven with Mosset's engagement with painting. "Something that's there and exists...could just have easily been made by someone else." Yet its materiality endures and like Mosset's continued commitment to painting, is a means but also a constraint. A beginning. An end.

Recent exhibitions include, Manifesta 10 (2014); Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris (2014); The Kitchen, New York, NY (2013); Cultural Offices of the French Embassy, NY (2013); Kunsthalle Zurich, Switzerland (2012); Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland (2011); and The Whitney Biennial, New York, NY (2008). Olivier Mosset lives and works in Tucson, Arizona and Brooklyn, New York.

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