

# Alexander and Bonin

*Four paintings lean against the wall of the artist's studio*

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Four paintings lean against the wall of the artist's studio, forming a sort of temporary exhibition prior to the exhibition. They seem to be looking at one another, as though asking themselves about their meaning, in a real and imaginary semicircle, in which they simultaneously repel and complete one another. They share much more in common than what meets the eye at a quick glance. It is not clear whether their mutual encounter in that space is random or deliberate, or a bit of both. They share a strange color palette, with a few vivid hues and many different shades of white, black, gray, and brown. Only at certain points does a larger area of green or a concentrated point of red stand out. They also share an inanimate, quiet, static quality. Nothing really happens in these paintings until we began to stare at them more intently.

Of all the characters in this scene, it is the vertical one that first gains our attention. Its name is *Fair* (all the paintings were made between 2014 and 2016), and, as with the rest of the paintings, it results from snapshots made by the artist, who, in a process shared by many painters, projects these images onto the canvas to create his paintings. *Fair* is somehow anthropomorphic in both its format and composition. The four piled TV sets could be the head, torso, and limbs of a majestic figure. This icon or robot, depending on how the reader prefers to see it, evokes a series of references that belong to the universe of art. At first, we think of the compositions that artists fascinated by technologies created with monitors some decades ago – towers, totems, walls, and gardens. Insofar as they are switched off, we think about the obsolescence of these screens and of their use in art today. They have become mirrors that reflect and decompose space, a self-reflective look at painting, painstakingly executed by the artist. *Fair* seems to be asking us how the old Van Eyck would react in its presence, upon seeing this pile of portable windows that offer a view onto nothing – except for the very space in which we find them. Left in the corridor of a fair (an art or electronics fair), they are waiting to be removed while we look at them with their head-on and stern expression, one that is hardly *fair* at all.

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In this dialogue, *Fair's* partner is the painting whose title lends itself to the exhibition, *Threshold*. Here the artist purposefully left two white vertical bands on the canvas, without any paint and only a few marks of graphite, to create a space that existed before the painting's theme – and which, paradoxically, is the theme itself. The interplays between figure and background are repeatedly and consistently present in all works featured in this exhibition. While the objects that make up *Fair* possess an erect character, those of *Threshold* are casual and disperse, revealing a more relaxed personality. The artist recorded this moment while passing by a repair shop on some street in Buenos Aires, a point of idle interest that may have arisen from his random map of *Buenos Aires Tour* (2003).<sup>1</sup> The rigidly framed scene voyeuristically reveals a snapshot of a fleeting – if not entirely uninteresting – meaning. The ready-mades are arranged in this space whose walls and floor can barely be made out. In light of their anonymity, we are compelled to name them: two boxes, three televisions, a portable oven, two washing machines, a part of a bed frame. They stage a sort of museum of uselessness and oblivion, fragments of domestic life on full display in the street.

The third character of our narrative is a space. For anyone familiar with Latin American cities, it is readily identified as the utility area of an apartment, semi-enclosed by a wall made of ventilation bricks which shuts off the space while simultaneously leaving it open. This vertical plane, pierced by a geometric pattern, is a direct allusion to the relationships between transparency and opacity that drive a significant part of the painterly tradition with which Jorge Macchi's work dialogues. His paintings give body to the experience of looking. Even with effort, we can see nothing more than a laundry sink, a folding chair, and a closed window. The exercise of voyeurism is shared with the spectator, but it is futile to watch expectantly for something to happen within the view of this indiscreet "rear window." As in the eponymous film, the action takes place outside the frame. Although it is the shyest of our characters, it has a robust title: *The Space in Between*.

While the previous character is vertical, the last to enter the scene, *False Ceiling*, is entirely horizontal – that is, if the word "entirely" can apply to anything in this ambiguous game that it is part of. Just as the previous space was *in between*, this space is *above*, although it is actually a plane between two planes. The observer-painter positions himself in front of a wall of mirrors, without his reflection appearing, and paints the false ceiling referred to in the title, one of those additions made in commercial buildings to alter the dimensions and quality of its spaces.

<sup>1</sup> *Buenos Aires Tour* is the title of an installation and artist book by Jorge Macchi, an anti-touristic itinerary made from the superposition of a shattered glass plate on a map of his city.

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We thus have two false ceilings, the one added to the space itself and the one reflected in the mirror. The circular openings in the ceiling are also not skylights allowing the entry of natural light, as they seem to be, but rather spaces where the artificial lighting is concealed; and we also begin to harbor suspicions about the three columns that hold up the ceiling above our heads. It is a painting about disappearance.

The curtain falls.

P.S.: Two scenic objects were left outside of the main narrative and now claim a voice in the story. *Gloves* and *Foot*, substitutes for hand and foot – each separated from their original bodies, are representations of representations, presences of absence. Christ's wounded left foot rests expectantly on a wooden pedestal whose natural wood grain echoes the shape of the wound, while a solitary and proud yellow dishwashing glove hangs on a gray background. In both cases, the brushstrokes are very evident. The pleasure of painting and the onus of depicting seem to go hand in hand in this curious pair. Their greatest charm lies in the way in which their full meaning remains hidden.



Jorge Macchi, *Fair* 2016, oil on canvas,  
82 1/2 x 41 1/4 in/210 x 125 cm