

Translucid Chamber: Jorge Macchi

by Laura Hakel

In 2016, after the Ruth Benzacar Gallery's switch from its historic headquarters in Florida Street to Villa Crespo, Jorge Macchi built a full-scale wooden replica of the old gallery and ensconced it in the new one, a spatial Russian doll conjuring ghostly echoes across the Gallery's forking pathways. The installation was called *Díptico* [Diptych], and you could explore it at your leisure. But now, in *Cámara translúcida* [Translucid Chamber], Macchi has created a space that is, in contrast, difficult to access: a mysterious wall of floating bricks, blocking entrance to the gallery, which is also sealed off six meters further on by a lattice of cement whose bricks are missing, as if the components of a wall had divorced. The two parts demarcate a new space of transparencies: through them, from the right angle, a large painting can be seen at the end of the gallery. To get a close-up look, the visitor has to alter their normal route and climb some stairs to one side, negotiate a string of desks and offices conducting transactions usually invisible to the public (and where Macchi has arranged a series of works, including small cages and watercoloured eyeballs), and finally descend to the gallery again through a back room crammed with works by other artists. When we arrive, we are greeted by a huge painting that seems to have been forced into being a lattice: a representation of bricks in a wall overlaying fragments of a Japanese erotic print. The history of art conceives of the picture as a window on the world, but a picture can be an opaque foreign body too, a prisoner of its edges.

Macchi's works investigate the way our eyes think. They are dense, intricate semantic networks, images that thematize the act of seeing and show how the relationship between what we see and what we know never quite stabilizes. By blocking off one access, the artist reveals another one generally hidden: the inner flows of art gallery circulation, the side corridors of the private art circuit. *Translucid Chamber* could be a portrait of the art system, with its symbolic and literal exclusion zones and voyeuristic views, and, at the same time, an exposé of the off-field as part of the spectacle. Roland Barthes once remarked that history is hysterically constructed: 'History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.' The works in this exhibition swing back and forth in an interplay of opening and closing. Their power lies in their ability to complicate the gaze, to signal unforeseen pathways for our desire.