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Filling three of the Gallery's four floors, this 40-piece solo show comprises wall reliefs, sculptures, and paintings. It is an impressive rendition of Bernar Venet's work proving a fine view of his artistic output over the past three decades.

Founded on a desire to probe, experiment, and pioneer, Venet's work is fuelled by the unanswerable question: What is art? Venet has consistently sought to find an irreducible image with a single reading, to "limit interpretation by people," to avoid formal composition, and, at all costs, the concept of the aesthetic. Ironically, it is in the rigidity and impersonality of the laws of mathematics, physics, and geometry that he has found artistic inspiration.

Each wall on the ground level has its own super-sized monochromatic wall relief. Executed in 1979, the off-kilter, ill-fitting square *Position of Four Right Angles* and bisected circle *Position of Two Arcs of 28/5* are the earliest works on show. They illustrate Venet's fascination with both geometry and his minimalist sensibility. These pieces act as the point of departure not only for the wooden reliefs of the *Indeterminate Lines* series and their more recent successors, the *GRIBs*, which they juxtapose ("GRIB" is an abbreviation of the French word *gribouillage*, meaning a scribble or doodle) but for the show as a whole.

Indeterminate Line (1981) is an enlarged, three-dimensional, black zig-zag that dramatically penetrates the wall space yet defies any suggestion of composition. The graphic line is more playful than in Venet's earlier works yet it maintains its rigidity and angularity. In this series, Venet explores how intervention can affect the path of a linear form. He notes that the variability of an artist's decision itself incorporates chance and thereby acknowledges the mathematical principle of indeterminacy.

Chance is explored further when Venet substitutes wood for metal in later sculptures, some of which are exhibited on the third floor. *Indeterminate Line* (1994) is a spiral of rolled steel. A solid rod of steel is twisted by clamps and tongs to make a contorted

shape but the outcome is unpredictable given the obstinacy of the material.

The experiment continues further still in *GRIBs*. Here the metal 'scribbled' lines are freer, less precise and controlled than their *Indeterminate* forebears. *GRIB 3* is a four-meter-wide monumental black scribble dominating the central first floor gallery wall. The relief radiates power and strength. Its vitality and dynamism, however, belie the arduous task of torch-cutting each piece of waxed steel by hand. From a distance, one might compare the fluidity of the reliefs to that of an Asian calligraphic character. As with each brushstroke, each doodle is unique yet beholden to the will of the artist/calligrapher.

Contrasting dramatically with the sculptural works on the first and third levels, which seem cool and austere by comparison, the paintings on level two are stunning; they exude opulence and warmth. Large-scale canvases—some of unusual shapes—with gold, pearlized-silver or copper fields are populated with layers of enlarged equations, formulae, and mathematical symbols that "saturate" the canvas.

In *Saturation with a Large Bracket* (2006), abstract mathematical texts are depicted in sumptuous colors crimson and midnight blue. The use of



Bernar Venet, Saturation with a Large Bracket, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 200 cm. Image: Courtesy of Art Plural Gallery

color is reminiscent of the divine works of Italian Byzantine painters and, together with the ultra-thick frame, the work is portrayed as something important to behold and respect. Quite simply, Venet has elevated the status of the most abstract of mathematical language and made it into an art form. Earlier works were founded on logic and theory, yet these are executed with pure intuition. Ironically, from a subject matter so cold and un-emotive Venet has produced works that are highly expressive and resonant.

The ultimate paradox must lie in the fact that as an artist committed to avoiding the aesthetic, he has created works that are so alluring and full of spirituality and soul.

Jo Shropshire



Above left: Bernar Venet, Position of an Indeterminate Line, 1981, graphite on wood, 189 x 189 cm. **Above right: Bernar Venet, GRIB 3, 2011**, torch-cut, waxed steel, 238 x 410 x 3.5 cm. Images: Courtesy of Art Plural Gallery.