

Barry X Ball
The Not Painting Collection

I made the 22 works of *The Not Painting Collection* over a 5 year period. *Tableau Mourant* and *Fleur-de-lys* belong to the penultimate phase of this series. As my series title suggests, these pieces were not paintings, per se, but physical discourses on painting and its conventions: its elemental composition; its history; its conservation, installation, transportation, and exhibition. The resultant hybrid objects unconventionally present - in a dense matrix of visual flourishes and art-historical touchpoints - the four basic elements of painting:

1. pigment (colored powder)
2. a solidified liquid medium (oil, acrylic, tempera, fresco plaster, etc.)
3. a support (canvas, panel, wall, paper, etc.)
4. a gesture (what the artist does with the other 3 elements)

These components are typically configured / utilized in the above order, with the pigment suspended in a solidified liquid medium (forming “paint”), which is then applied to the support by the painter in “gestures” of infinite permutation (pictures, patterns, monochromes, layers, washes, impastos, glazes, stains, etc.)

In my *Not Painting* works, the “paint” is comprised of 4 liters of pure dry pigment contained in a rectangular jar (made of a solidified liquid medium: glass). The “support” is an elaborate, architectonic shelf-like structure displaying a prominent “gesture”: a golden praedella stroke.

The pigment for *Tableau Mourant*, Perylene Black, is the same as that utilized for the “cloaking” paint on the American “Stealth” military aircraft. It is presented amidst a panoply of references to death, sexual/artistic creativity, and religious art traditions. Tuscan Gothic architectural stripes; mirrored Cyrillic font “VIRGIN” text; a neo-rococo heart profile; and Bernini-esque spiral thread columns frame the central pairing of

stacked squares: the frosted pigment jar “paint” above an “ejaculatory” upside-down gold panel. This vertical reversal of the stereotypical Gothic / Renaissance gold-ground / paint orientation is echoed in the work’s inverted Latin-cruciform profile.

Fleur-de-lys, with its regal pairing of cobalt violet pigment and gold, presents those sensual components more directly, without the overt religio-sexual symbolism of *Tableau Mourant*. Uniform-width stripes suffuse the work. From the alternating regularity of the support’s epoxy-drip honeycomb-layered construction to the corrugated stripe-gilded panel, an incessant 12mm rhythm is established. Note that the “passive” etched horizontal stripes of the pigment jar face (echoing the sedimentary packing of its powdered contents) contrast with the “active” verticality of the “erupting” gold. In a final, seemingly-incongruous gesture of comical counterpoint, the work’s rigid geometricity dissolves, at its lower edge, with an effusive “decorative” flourish.

All of my work from the early 1980’s through *The Not Painting Collection* featured at least one gilded panel. The “brushy” gold in these two works, although appearing to have been applied in a single vertical “painting” stroke with a broad tool, was in fact created through a painstaking, labor-intensive, semi-“sculptural” process. Literally hundreds of layers of gesso and bole (clay) were brushed onto the panel faces, then carved and polished before the gold was applied in a grid of individual 12mm squares. The final surface gleam was achieved by methodical hematite-burnishing. My intention was to create a frozen “masculine” mirror-fountain of cultured spontaneity, emanating from / reflecting the crotch, “spouting” in heartfelt tribute to the heart-level “feminine” vessel above.

Each of these works is replete with two exhibitable cases: an inner wooden cabinet and an outer roto-moded plastic container. The elaborate, finely-crafted, lacquered-maple inner case contains a complete “survival” kit: installation templates and supplies, spare parts, gloves, photographs, and instructions. The outer case (the same type used by the U.S. military to air-drop materiel) is a heavy-duty water-tight protective enclosure. During shipping, an additional outer crate (effectively a 3rd case) forms a final layer of armor for the precious contemporary icon inside.