

The ground is the figure is the ground

Written by Eduardo Vivanco, 2012

These large scale paintings, part of the two series Rings and Loops, are *reflections* in its two meanings —i.e., mental and optic or physical. Adrian Navarro puts in front of us a clear equivocation of figure and ground. The classic geometries of ring and helix are carved as reliefs with precise ambivalence —sometimes the circular holes are opaque, sometimes transparent— revealing their painted matter. These volumes are intermittently altering their own figure-ground revealing technique: they are themselves defined against a veiled ground of formless paint; the ring is self-contained, whereas the loop is an open-ended figure cropped by the frame of the canvas; both contain figures within them, and are the ground to their own figures as well. Yes, it's complicated.

What Navarro is presenting here is the Battle of the Paintings that has been taking place at his studio for the last half decade, three centuries after The Battle of the Books at the King's Library —both in London. What Jonathan Swift satirized in 1704, was the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. The beehive and the spiderweb were the metaphors of that day. Today, the battle is that between: abstraction and figuration, craft and design, the eye and the hand, movement and confinement, and ultimately between totality and infinity. The work of Emmanuel Levinas of 1969 (*Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*) finds in these series —and in the gallery as battleground— its best pictorial equivalent.

This is thus the space of epic, of heroic confrontation, but it is not a narrative space. The variations within the series speak of self-absorbed movement: by using the language of that which was accused to kill painting —i.e., photography— Navarro is rhyming the works of Muybridge and Marey in the series. They present the endless rotation of the struggle between opposites, a messianic synthesis about to happen —anticlimactic epic painting.

Adrián Navarro: Reflections. Maerz Contemporary. Berlin, 2012