

Joseph Nechvatal *Recent Paintings* 29 January-23 February 2008

From 26 January to 23 February Galerie Jean-Luc & Takako Richard are for the first time putting on a one-man-show of Joseph Nechvatal's art called *Recent Paintings*.

Joseph Nechvatal, born in Chicago in 1951, lives and works in Paris and in New York. Nechvatal's work, both at the technical and conceptual levels, has today become a reference in digital art. With a PhD in art and new technologies, he teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Nechvatal has worked with electronic images and information technology since 1986. His computer-assisted paintings turn intimate images of the naked body into pictorial units that are then transformed by IT viruses. His work includes a blend of drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, writing and IT language. Contamination of the tradition of painting on canvas by new digital technology thus creates an interface between the virtual and reality, which Joseph Nechvatal calls *viractual*.

It was back in 1991, while working at the Louis Pasteur workshop in Arbois, and in at the Royal Saltworks of Arc et Senans that Nechvatal and Jean-Philippe Massonie developed a program of IT viruses. In 2001 Joseph Nechvatal and Stéphane Sikora combined the initial IT virus project with the principles of artificial life, in other words creating systems of synthesis that reproduce the behavioral features of living systems. Artificial life ferments are introduced in an image. This population of active viruses then grows, reproduces and propagates within the space of the picture. The artist then freezes a moment that he later turns into a painting. Were the artist not to interfere, the process of propagation would continue until the complete destruction of the original picture.

These non-infected images are themselves the result of a series of manipulations. Images of naked bodies and superimposed fragments of flesh are transformed and recomposed. They can also be seen as biomorphic abstractions. The bodies are in fact derived from photographs taken by the artist of classical Greek and Roman sculptures.

Finally, Nechvatal sends his files by internet to a robot that paints the picture in acrylics on canvas.

Following the example of the great masters' representations of the human body, a constant theme of Nechvatal's work is death, or rather the process leading to death that we call life. By injecting viruses and organizing simulations, the philosopher-artist deconstructs our illusions, our longing for permanence and the very ideology of progress, while at the same time, and without any nostalgia, pronounces the end of a world and of an order.

The artist shows us altered, impermanent, mutating images that are as such pictures of our world. Yet Joseph Nechvatal is still offering us painting, together with its history and sudden breaks, breaks that are often linked to technical and scientific advances over the centuries. This painting still provides us with moments of silent immobility that enables us to escape the tyranny of the world, allows us to pause for contemplation and thought.

Joseph Nechvatal's works have been exhibited in the greatest museums in New York, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of Art and the New Museum, as well as in other great museums in America, Europe and Asia.