

MICHÈLE SCHOONJANS GALLERY



Nicolas DELPRAT

Humming the World

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Curator : Hans Theys

Brussels

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VERNISSAGE Sunday 6 September from 2 to 6 pm

Rivoli Building

Michèle Schoonjans Gallery

690/25 & 26 Chaussée de Waterloo

B- 1180 Bruxelles

ouvert du jeudi au samedi de 12h à 18h et sur rendez-vous
ouvert le dimanche 11 octobre 2026 de 14h à 18h

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The Michèle Schoonjans Gallery is delighted to present the fourth solo exhibition by Nicolas Delprat, a French artist who has been living in Belgium for over twenty years.

Through a new series of paintings, the artist continues his unique exploration in which light, memory and perception unfold within a subtle tension between appearance and disappearance.

The exhibition is further enriched by a previously unpublished text by Hans Theys, *Humming the World*, together with a curatorial concept developed through a close collaboration between the critic, the artist and the gallery.

Humming the world On the work of Nicolas Delprat

I'd like to begin this text with a strange question. If the work of Nicolas Delprat (born 1972) didn't speak about art history and the production of artworks—which it certainly does—what would it tell us? What story is being concealed here?

"I'm fascinated by memory," he says, "for example, when it invents images. In my memory, my favourite scene in *Taxi Driver* was the moment Travis Bickle shaves his head. But when I recently rewatched the film, it turns out this scene doesn't exist at all. You see Bickle running up the stairs to his apartment and returning with his head shaved. Scorsese has employed an ellipsis: the actual action isn't visible and is only suggested. I hope to do something similar with my work. It often starts from things seen, but I don't want to recreate them. I use them as starting points for minimal work that can evoke stories or images in the viewer."

This means we are free. But we can also fantasise about the unspoken images that Delprat, consciously or unconsciously, wants to evoke. The nonexistent scene in which Bickle shaves his head is very physical, martial, and radical. The result is an early Lucio Fontana; a bristly *Onement* by Barnett Newman.

However, if we look at Delprat's way of working, we find a different underlying narrative—one that says something about painting, but also about action, life, and thought. In summary, we can say that he paints in two ways: very meticulously and very freely. Between these two actions lies a vast, unexplored zone, a field of untapped possibilities. This creates paintings in which this choice can be read. They tell us something about painting, but also about being. Below, I will say more about the different ways of painting and the importance of meta-paintings. But first, I want to say something about this way of being.

If we view the painting as the trace of an action, we encounter a person who works very cautiously and attentively—like Agnes Martin, for example: slowly, repetitively, meditatively. And then we see drips, splatters, and large traces of brushstrokes, which reveal various forms of letting go. The drips have something sensual and tactile; the splatters and brushstrokes evoke a more far-reaching physicality: an eruption, a release, or a broad arm movement. Here too, we discover the body, as we did with Bickle, almost hidden from view by an ellipsis. Simultaneously, we read a story of relinquished control, of growing trust and self-confidence, of restraint and decisiveness.

With the exception of one series (the *Dynamique* paintings on paper, created during a residency when canvas was out of reach), all of Delprat's works begin with a smooth, white polyester canvas that is first primed with a white base coat and then completely or partially covered with a matte black acrylic paint applied with a spray gun. The figures or optical effects (fluorescent light tubes in the 'Dan' series, doorways in the 'James' series) are created by layering numerous layers of diluted acrylic paint over this black. Only after the fortieth layer do these additions become visible; usually, around sixty layers are applied. Thus, light is reclaimed from the black. It is an illusion, a painterly magic trick.

Most optical effects are created this way: slowly, applied with a small brush. A stunning example of this can be found in the paintings featuring a representation of chicken wire. The 'chicken wire' is the trace of an overpainted black background (created by spraying lighter colours over actual chicken wire laid over the canvas). Where the wire is no longer visible, or where it appears fainter, it has been painted over by dabbing with a very small brush.

The constantly evolving 'Dan' and 'James' series, whose titles refer to the minimalist light sculptures of Dan Flavin and James Turrell, are based on memories of experiences with these sculptures. The Dan series evokes the image of luminous fluorescent tubes, each time in a different composition. Turrell worked with sunlight, Flavin with artificial light. In Delprat's paintings, we don't see real light, of course, but a reconstruction of a memory—the creation of an illusion.

The beauty of the pairing of meticulous and more decisive, rapid actions is that they create a pictorial space that seems to unfold at different depths. The gradients and other atmospheric backgrounds are pushed into a fictional background by actions that seem to take place in the foreground: splashes of paint thrown next to the canvas, broad traces of paint (applied with a wide, thin brush), or a fake passe-partout painted at the end with black acrylic paint. The absence of "mixed forms" between the meticulous and the robust makes this pictorial depth highly legible, meaning that the painting also tells us something about the composition of paintings. Another way to do this is by leaving traces of tape.

The absence of perspectivist depth or volume modulation reminds us of the American abstract expressionists (Newman, Reinhardt, Rothko, Pollock), but also of Supports/Surfaces and BMPT. The pictorial space created by differences in texture and colour intensity is reminiscent of the early watercolours of Soulages or the twirling paintings of Christopher Wool. The overpainting of "expressive" elements such as drips is reminiscent of Hans Hartung. Together, these painters form the interlocutors with whom Delprat converses.

I enjoy being in this kind of company. There's not much noise. There's whispering. There's experimentation. There's fiddling, struggling, cursing, and enjoying. It's a very solitary activity, but the silent conversation with other painters, sculptors, filmmakers, and writers simultaneously alleviates this loneliness. In the stillness, we merge with the others.

A magic trick also takes place—a secret exchange. The whole world, with all its heaviness, volume, murmur, movement, desire, and transience, is conjured away, yet evoked in a gentle or decisive gesture. In a soft singing, a humming of existence. (For what do we call a song without words, without meaning-distinguishing sounds, without recognisable images?)

My favourite paintings are the dynamic "landscapes". I love their atmospheric, seemingly dissolving backgrounds and the almost uncontrollable splashes that seem to play out in the foreground. Once the background is finished, Delprat throws a large blob of paint next to the painting in such a way that the splashes appear to point in a single direction, creating an illusion of movement. We know that Bacon also finished paintings by throwing a dab of white paint on to them, which gives the whole scene a new depth. The art critic David Sylvester asks Bacon whether his cleaning lady could throw the paint in his place. Bacon confirms. Then Sylvester asks if he himself could throw the paint. "No, you couldn't," Bacon replies. At least, that's how I remember it. But upon rereading the interviews, I couldn't find this passage. I probably made it up.

Hans Theys
Montagne de Miel
6 January 2026

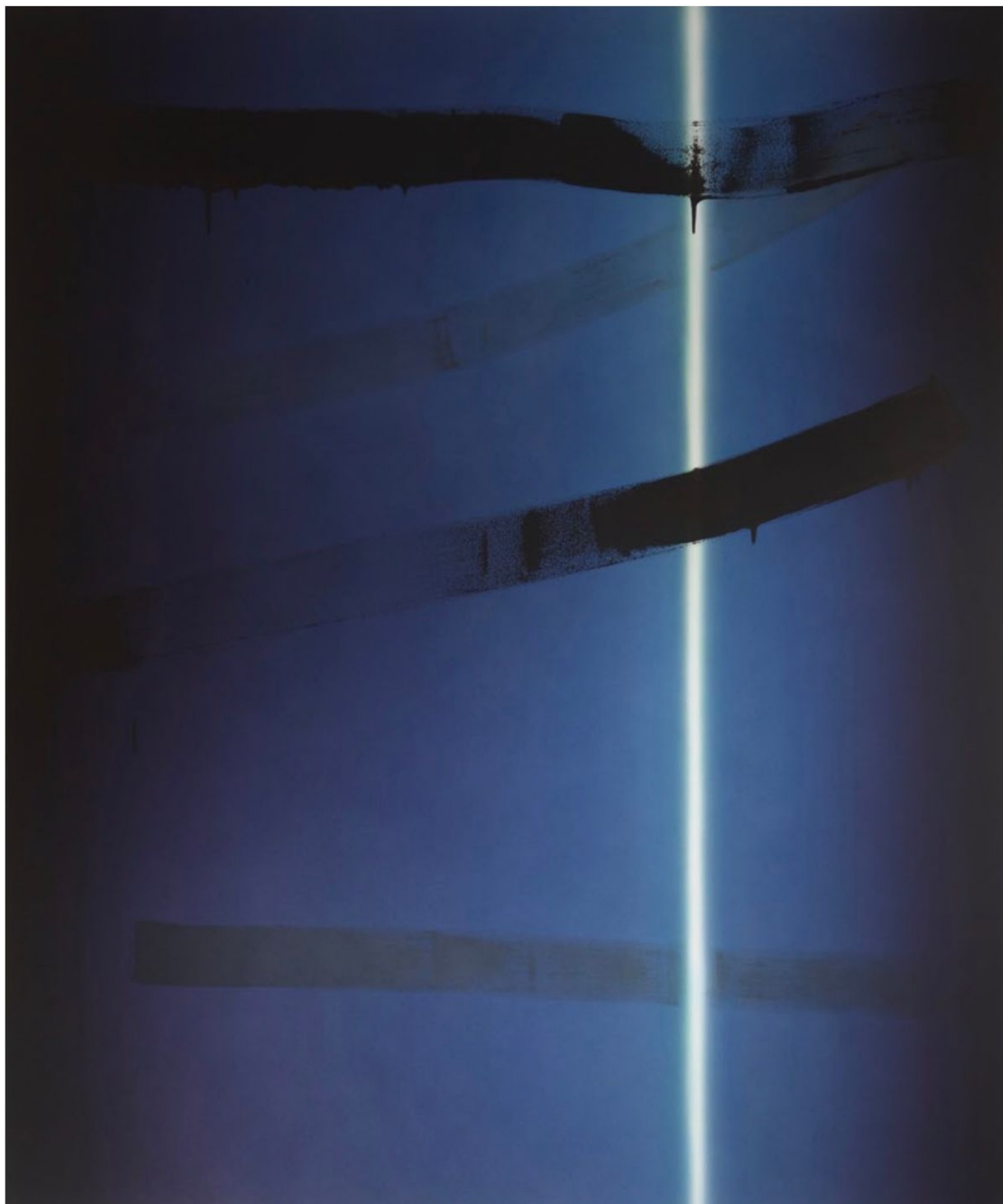


Dan put back evolution 3

2026

acrylic on canvas

180 x 150 cm

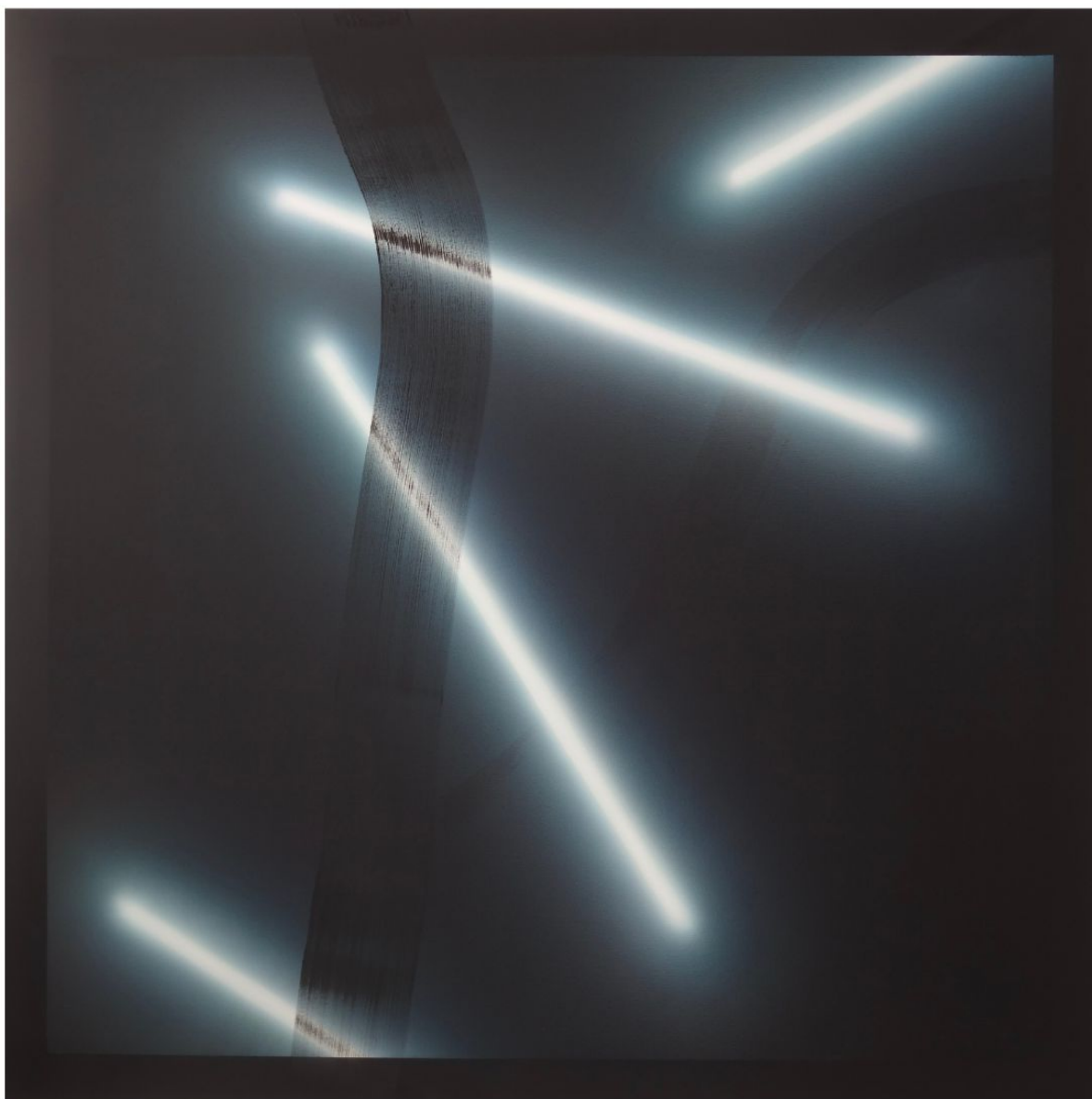


Dan evolution 10

2025

acrylic on canvas

180 x 150 cm



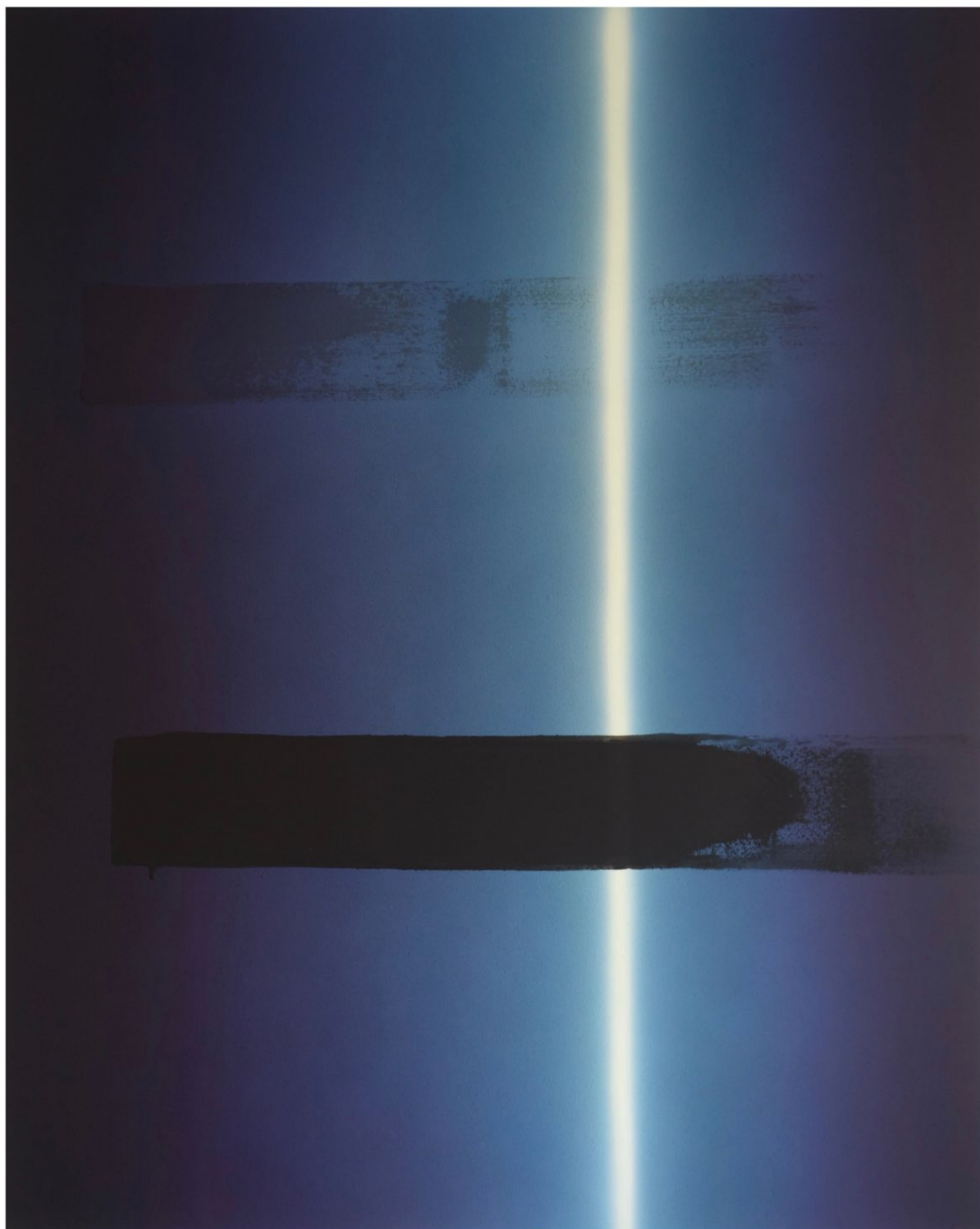
Dan put back evolution 4

2026

acrylic on canvas

150 x 150 cm



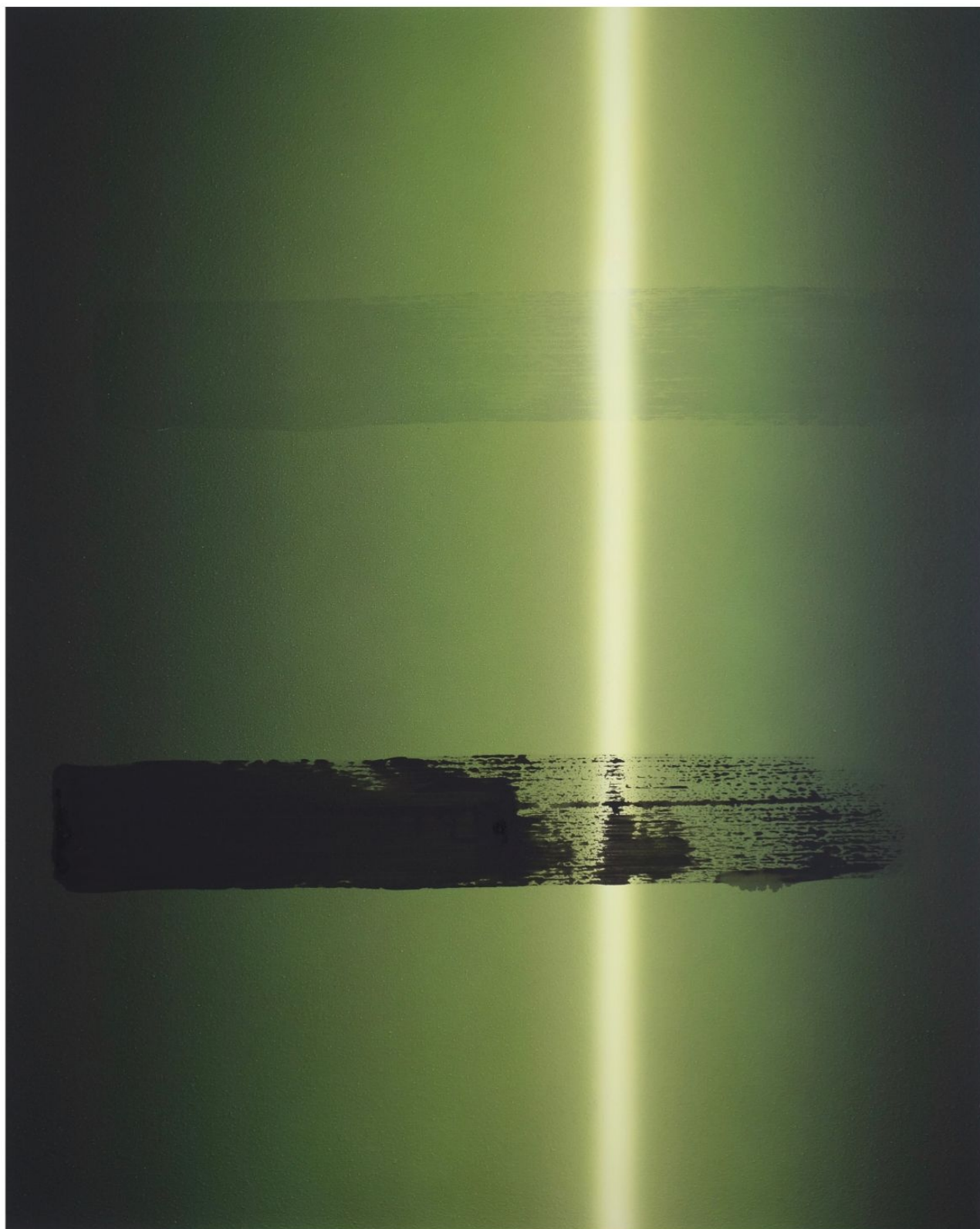


Dan evolution 12

2025

acrylic on canvas

100 x 80 cm



Dan evolution 9

2025

acrylic on canvas

100 x 80 cm



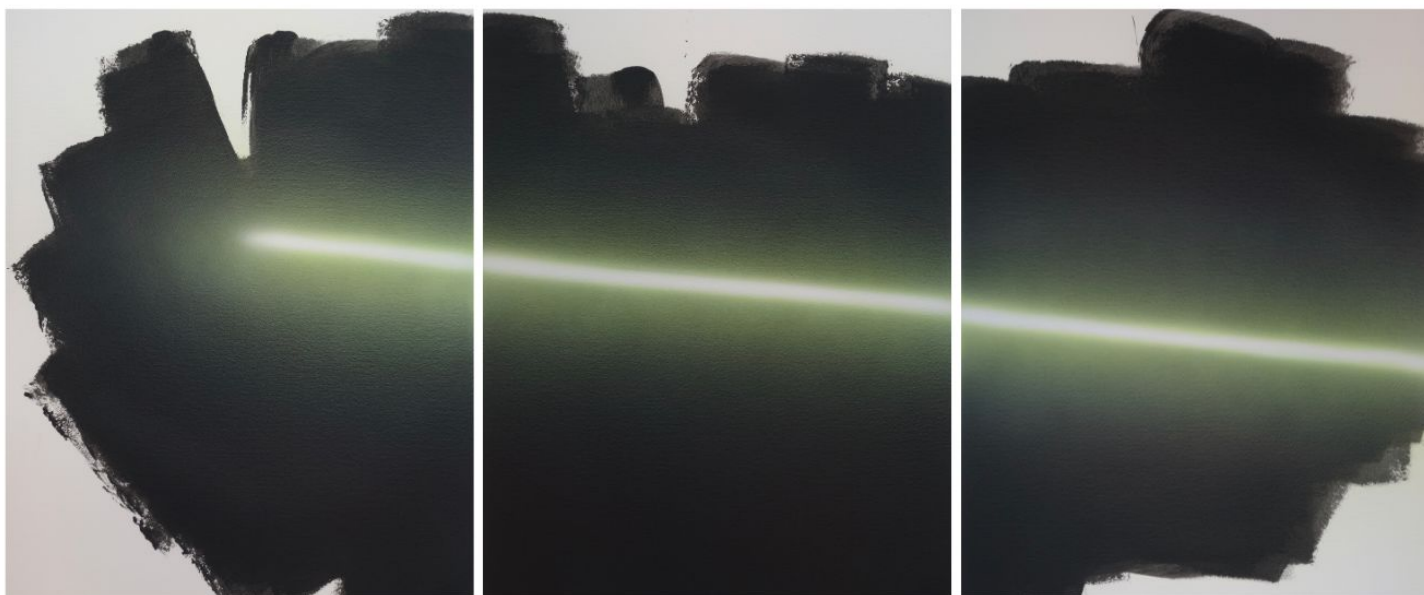
Dan surface non déterminée 2 - dyptique

2026

acrylic on paper

76,5 x 56 cm (x 2)



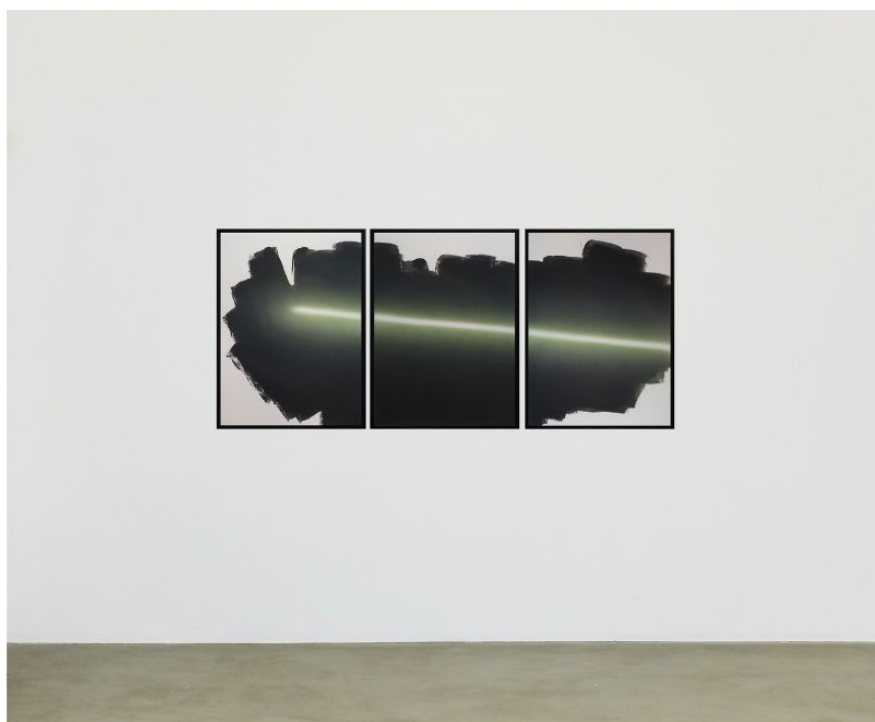


Dan, surface non déterminée 1, 2, 3 - tryptique

2026

acrylic on paper

76,5 x 56 cm (x 3)





Dan, surface non déterminée 3 - dyptique

2026

acrylic on paper

76,5 x 56 cm (x 2)





Dan, surface non déterminée 2 B

2026

acrylic on paper

56 x 45 cm



Dynamique 2 A, Dynamique 2 B

2025

acrylic on paper

56 cm x 76,5 (chaque)



Dan surface active B

2026

embossing on paper & acrylic
50 x 39,5 cm



Dan surface active C

2026

embossing on paper & acrylic
50 x 39,5 cm

Biography

Nicolas Delprat creates paintings and installations that explore the role and significance of light in painting, drawing upon a legacy that runs through art history, from the invention of photography to the neon works of Dan Flavin and the immersive environments of James Turrell. His practice is grounded in a mode of representation that seeks to subject sources of light to both mnemonic and painterly processes.

His paintings often evoke remembered lights: forgotten, recollected or imagined illuminations that are ultimately reinterpreted through the medium of painting. They serve as the starting point for a narrative, an unfolding image whose meaning and possibilities remain open to the viewer's imagination.

Nicolas Delprat graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon in 1997. In 1998, he completed an international postgraduate programme in Nantes, France. In 2017-2018, he was an artist member of the Casa de Velázquez in Madrid. His work is held in numerous private and public collections, including the Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain d'Auvergne and the Centre National des Arts Plastiques (CNAP).

Solo exhibitions (selection)

2026 « Fredonner le monde » Michèle Schoonjans Gallery, commissariat Hans Theys, Brussels, Belgium
2024 « L'obscur objet... » N. Delprat et R. Labastie, Musée Kéramis, la Louvière, Belgium
2023 « Deep down inside » Michèle Schoonjans Gallery, commissariat Marc Donnadieu. Brussels, Belgium
2023 « La nuit américaine » Galerie Maubert, commissariat Marguerite Pilven. Paris, France.
2022 « L'un tout contre l'autre, à l'épreuve du monde » Telmah Art contemporain, Rouen. France.
2021 « Faire espace par le geste » Ecole d'art, site de Saint-Omer, France.
2021 « Stage Two » Michèle Schoonjans Gallery, Brussels, Belgium.
2021 « Appearances of light » Michèle Schoonjans Gallery, Brussels, Belgium.
2019 « Minimal chaos » Galerie Maubert, Paris. France.
2018 « La noche que lo hace visible » - Centre d'art Huarte - Navarra - Spain.
2017 « Collectionair » Commissaire Olivier Varenne, London, United Kingdom.
2015 « Liberté, liberté chérie » Centre d'art contemporain. Lyon, France.
2015 « The dawn of man » Espace d'art de Vénissieux, France.
2012 « In the middle of the night » Nicolas Delprat & Angélica Markul, Galeria BWA Lublin, Poland .
2009 « La disparition des corps » Galerie Kamchatka, commissariat Christian Alandete. Paris, France.
2008 « l'indécise lumière tout autour... » Frac Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, France.
2008 « Mehr Licht » Espace Vallès, Saint-Martin d'Hères, France.

Group exhibitions (selection)

2026 « Desenfocado » Caixa Forum, Barcelone. Sapin.
2025 « Desenfocado » Caixa Forum, Madrid. Sapin.
2025 « Interieurs » Grand Tour Colaab, Paris. France.
2025 « Dans le flou. une autre vision de l'art, de Monet à Richter » Musée de l'orangerie, Paris. France.
2024 « Les lois de l'imaginaire » Frac Auvergne et Musée d'Aurillac, commissariat Laure Forlay, France.
2021 « Percées dans le visible » Académie de France, Casa de Velazquez. Madrid, Spain.
2021 « Festival Les jours de lumière » Saint-Saturnin, France.
2020 « 30 ans » Espace Vallès, Saint-Martin d'Hères, France.
2020 « Horizons » commissariat Pascal Bouchaille, Docks, Bordeaux. France.
2019 « Vaste territoire » Villa Beatrix Enea. Anglet, France.
2018 « Itinérance » Académie des beaux-arts, Paris, France.
2018 « Viva Villa », Villa Méditerranée, commissariat Cécile Debray. Marseille, France.
2017 « Maison rouge » Galerie Métropolis, Commissaire Isabelle de Maison Rouge, Paris, France.
2016 « We can control space, Le 6B, Paris. France.
2015 « Hybride 3, Fragmentations » Commissaire Paul Ardenne, Douai, France.
2015 « Beyond » Centre culturel coréen, Brussels, Belgium.



Since 2021, the Michèle Schoonjans Gallery has upheld a rigorous program that carefully brings together emerging and established artists. The gallery is located in a unique building in Uccle, an iconic structure from the 1970s. Its focus is on painting, drawing, and photography, with a particular interest in sensitive practices rooted in a materiality that invites contemplation.

The atypical layout of the space allows for a rare closeness to the works and encourages genuine artistic experimentation. Artists are invited to push the boundaries of their practice by taking full ownership of the space.

The gallery is especially drawn to artistic approaches that explore light, modes of habitation, landscapes, and the narrative potential of visual forms.

It represents and showcases artists based in Belgium, including Nicolas Delprat, Jérôme Bouchard, Laurent Dumortier, Michiko Van de Velde, Natacha Mercier, Sam Ballet, Luis Guzman, Jean-Baptiste Brueder, Ellen Dhondt and more recently, Elium (Elise de Falletans). It also represents international artists such as Mathieu Bonardet, Danielle Kwaaitaal, Bea Sarrias, Tom Henderson, Mathieu Meijers, Denis Brihat, Andreas Senoner, Scarlett Hooft Graafland and Manon Sarah Thirriot.

In 2024, the gallery expanded to optimise its exhibition and reception spaces. This development is part of a broader strategic vision aimed at increasing the visibility of its artists within cultural institutions, both in Belgium and internationally. Since 2023, the gallery has actively participated in local and international contemporary art fairs.

The Michèle Schoonjans Gallery is a member of BUP (Belgian Union of Modern and Contemporary Art Galleries), the national association of modern and contemporary art galleries, which shares the same objectives as FEAGA (Federation of European Art Galleries Associations)