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“Review: Davide Balula jams the circuits of light, space”

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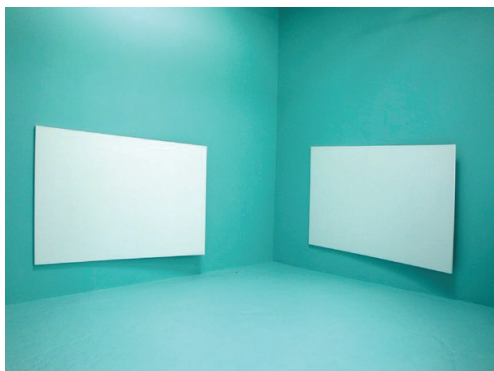


Image Credit: Christopher Knight / Los Angeles Times / February 21, 2013)

French artist Davide Balula takes a deep dive into a shallow pool for his new painting installation. The disarming reversals are confounding.

The stairs, floor and three surrounding walls of the step-down room at Francois Ghebaly Gallery, where Balula is having his Los Angeles debut, are painted a rich turquoise blue, its watery luminosity enhanced by the skylight overhead. Three large, pristine white canvases hang on the walls.

Like Robert Rauschenberg's 1951 white paintings, Balula's capture only ambient light and shadow. But the French artist's paintings are not conventional rectangles. Instead, three-dimensional polygons slope at the bottom and curve away from the wall, almost like peeling paint.

The paintings' eccentric format derives from the tilted, sloping curved walls on the spiral ramp of the Guggenheim Museum, which architect Frank Lloyd Wright conceived as an ideal foil for easel paintings. The design, transferred here from New York to L.A., also switches the established relationship between Wright's walls and rectangular paintings hanging on them. The color likewise flips, trading in the Northeast Atlantic for a Southwest Pacific hue.

Balula's installation is titled with a set of instructions: “1. Turn West / 2. Form a Circle With Your Mouth / 3. Let the Sun Set In.” Standing in his chromatically saturated, unconventional space makes one oddly lightheaded, all the while demanding close scrutiny in order to determine what is generating the swoon.

At the entry Balula stuck pairs of colored pencils into several electrical sockets. An enigmatic gesture, it turns out to neatly prefigure the way the painting installation jams the circuits of standard Light and Space art.