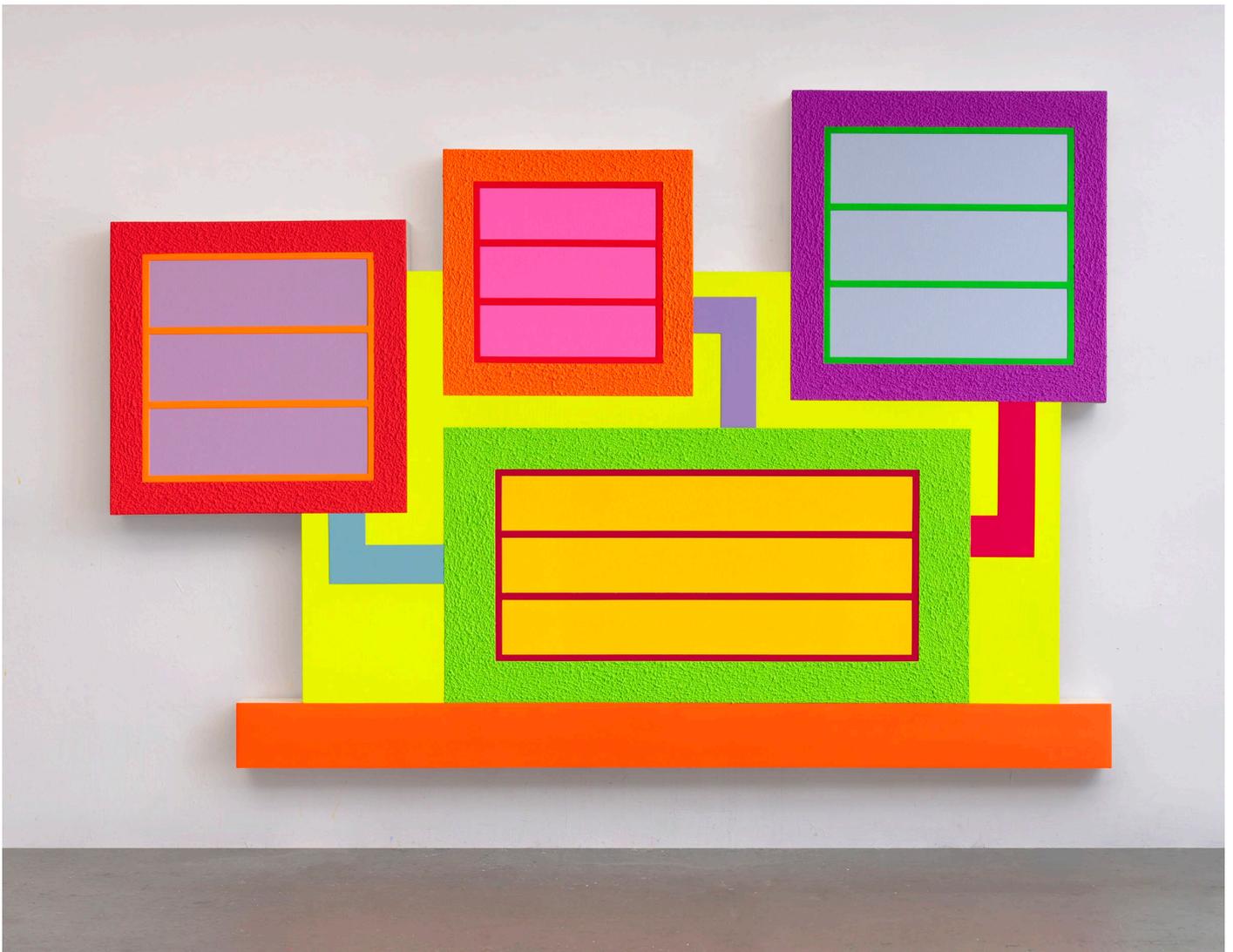


**MARUANI MERCIER**

**PETER HALLEY**  
**NEW WORKS**

**Laurent Mercier interviews Peter Halley - July 19, 2020**



Peter Halley, *A Perfect Plan*, 2020  
acrylic, fluorescent acrylic and Roll-a-Tex on canvas  
188 x 275,5 cm | 74 x 108 1/2 in

**Laurent Mercier** In my opinion your work is remarkable not only because you are a true innovator, creating paintings which stylistically stand apart from anything that has preceded them but also because your paintings foretold how our future would evolve.

In the early 1980s, when you expressed that our countries, cities, communities and even each of us as individuals would operate as cells, remaining interconnected only through selected conduits which would exclusively connect us and isolate us, it was visionary.

At that time the PC didn't exist and mobile phones were a decade away. Today we use them to communicate with the person sitting next to us, and in a time of seeming 'connectivity' we are more 'locked in' than ever before, hence your prisons.

**Peter Halley** Of course I didn't know exactly what would happen, but I did argue that the whole space of the internet was an extension of the spatial networks that already existed, such as the telephone and the television, superhighways and subways. The organized, technological control of our movement through space starts all the way back in the 19th century with the railroad and telegraph. The internet and the computer are just the final movement of that system into the dematerialized realm of electromagnetic energy.

**LM** What are your thoughts about this looking back four decades?

**PH** The world wide web almost seems to have been invented to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, doesn't it? For example, thirty years ago, before the web, hardly anyone could "work from home." I've been thinking that maybe this is not so surprising. Michel Foucault argued that the organization of modern life had its origin in measures taken to combat the epidemics of plague that regularly swept through Europe over the centuries. In response, people's movements were first regulated, surveillance of the population began, sewers and sources of clean water were first ordered by central authority. Perhaps, on some deep unconscious level, the rise of internet culture comes from the same fear of epidemics and contagion.

**LM** The influence of Joseph Albers on your work has been remarked on before. I would like to know however who you consider to be the colourist who has influenced you the most?

**PH** As a young artist, I learned a lot from Albers' extraordinary book, *The Interaction of Color*. But for the last forty years, Picasso has been the biggest influence, especially his paintings of the early 1930s with their electric oranges, lavenders, and greens. He was experimenting with bold, unexpected juxtapositions of color, employing not just harmony but dissonance as well. That's exactly what I'm trying to do.

**LM** As a great admirer of you and your work, do you feel comfortable when I refer to you as one of the greatest colorists of the first half of the 21st century?

**PH** Of course, I'm deeply appreciative that you would say that. The art world today is so often focused on financial rewards. But for me, as an artist, recognition is the goal that primary motivates me. By the way, I should point out that I would reject the word "greatest." It works better for sports where you can actually quantify the results. I would prefer to be considered one of the most expressive, outrageous, or experimental colorists – any of those adjectives would be fine with me!

**LM** Our ninth solo exhibition is your first exhibition of multi-panel shaped canvas paintings in our gallery. When did you start working this way?

**PH** I made the first paintings with multiple shaped canvases for my show at Lever House in New York in 2018. The gallery faces onto Park Avenue, so the paintings could be seen from the street.

I decided to make paintings that would have irregular silhouettes so that they would make a strong impression from a distance. That simple decision led to some very interesting results, especially in those multi-panel paintings where the prisons and cells are woven together like a jig-saw puzzle. Because I use such a limited number of elements in my work, a single change tends to lead to unpredictable, often dramatic results.

**LM** During the lockdown you had the chance to escape NYC and go to Connecticut. I remember you were still very affected by the Corona crisis, how has this influenced the works you were making for the Knokke exhibition?

**PH** Yes, I still have a house in Guilford, Connecticut, from the time that I was teaching at Yale. I was fortunate to be able to self-isolate in a quiet place where I could take solitary walks in the woods. But the crisis was very much with me as the pandemic swept through Europe and then New York. I think the paintings in this exhibition have a unique intensity as a result.



**LM** This exhibition is a hymn to radical positivism with its new architecture, its vibrancy and bright colours. You have created an artistic language that, through each decade, has allowed you to reflect new thoughts. In this way, your work remains always of its time and yet is rooted in your own classicism. What do you think about this?

**PH** That's so generous. I see my work as a kind of diary. As it turns out, making paintings of a simple flat space showing how hermetic, enclosed structures are connected – or not connected, allows me to say a lot.

**LM** Do you know if a curve will ever or never appear in your work?

**PH** Oh Laurent! In my graphic work, my digital prints, I almost entirely use curves. Wait till you see the M6 race car I am designing for BMW for the 24-hour race at Spa this fall!

**LM** After the Lever House exhibition in NYC, the installation you did last year during the Venice Biennale, and your recent installation at Green Naftali, are you eager to work as an architect – what we can expect next?

**PH** Even though I like to design spaces in which to exhibit my paintings, I am certainly not an architect. I have a great deal of respect for the practice of architecture, for the complex thinking that goes into the making of buildings. My own interest is in the interaction of two-dimensional images and three-dimensional space – how two-dimensional images can change our perception of three-dimensional space, and how moving through three-dimensional space changes our perception of the two-dimensional images we encounter.

# **PETER HALLEY**

## **NEW WORKS**

**On view from 1 August until 3 September 2020**  
**Kustlaan 9, 8300 Knokke**

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HR images are available in the [press section](#) of our website.  
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