

Apparently Empty

Ignasi Aballí

May 16 - June 28 2025

Apparently Empty is Ignasi Aballí's fifth solo exhibition at the gallery. This exhibition synthesizes certain notions and concepts that the Spanish artist has meticulously explored over the past thirty years. It is an exhibition that questions the appearance of things, the processes of creation, all perceived through the relentless passage of time.

In the right room, the visitor is immediately confronted with an isolated artwork. This canvas, titled ***Inactivity / Activity***, has a dirty, dusty appearance due to being abandoned in the studio for five years. Continuing a reflection on the status of artworks, the artist recently entrusted this painting to a framer and asked them to frame it without taking any precautions beyond their usual practices. Upon close inspection, the visitor discerns traces of handling left by the framer: primarily fingerprints that have wiped away dust along the edges of the canvas—negative traces, in a sense. As the title suggests, the framer's activity succeeds the artist's inactivity, as the latter "forgot" a canvas in the studio. This piece can be seen as a manifesto on time: born of forgetfulness, made of accumulated dust, and bearing the memory of professional gestures.

Opposite this work is the ***Blank Spaces*** series of prints—empty image rectangles subtitled with abstract, unrepresentable terms such as ***The Inexistent***, ***The Unconceivable***, and ***The Unknown***. These are spaces devoid of images, left open, interpretable by each viewer. Challenging the omnipresence of images in our societies, the artist allows the viewer to fill the empty frame. But what is to be seen? What is inexistent? The image? What is inconceivable? Buying an artwork with nothing to see? What is unknown? The future? It is within this void that the richness of potentiality and the vastness of imagination reside. ***A fertile paradox: removing the image here leads to adding vision***, as Gérard Wajcman might say.

In the left room, two series of canvases are displayed. One plays on illusion and visual deception: the brown-toned canvases are not raw canvases but rather fascinatingly imitative bronze replicas. Their dimensions follow the standard sizes of stretchers available from art supply vendors. The staples, grain, and folds of the canvas are reproduced with great precision. Interspersed within this series are several "marble canvases," presented in their veined whiteness. Marble and bronze are the noble materials of classical statuary, durable materials continuously used by sculptors since antiquity. Ultimately, Aballí shows us sculptures of painting. The title's double meaning, ***Objet de la peinture***, is particularly evocative in this regard.

Ignasi Aballí is accustomed to making radical gestures. When invited to represent Spain at the 2022 Venice Biennale, he decided to reconstruct the Spanish pavilion identically but rotated by 10 degrees—a bold move as he chose to showcase only this displacement, this void. A pavilion within a pavilion with nothing else to see but the architectural maneuver bathed in natural light. This shift—subtle yet striking, meticulously planned yet absurd, austere yet full of humor—recurs throughout the artist's practice. An example can be seen in the back room with the ***Seven Impressions of an Etching Plate*** series, which consists of embossings of engraving plates on paper without using any ink—a drypoint engraving. The blank plates were positioned each time in a unique and abnormal way, creating displacements that ironically defy the laws of geometry. There is no image except for the absence of the plate, no image except the recorded gesture of the engraver.

The large canvas, ***Apparently Empty (time)***, is another reference to time, forgetfulness, and the temporality of the creative process in the studio. In this masterful version, Aballí exhibits a canvas abandoned in the studio for thirty years. This canvas accompanied the artist through most of his artistic career. It is a kind of potential masterpiece, a promise of a painting yet to come. Now presented in its whiteness (which has gradually yellowed), it bears marks, stains, and scratches that appear as stigmas of time. By framing it in 2025, the artist decided to seal the fate of this nomadic canvas and give it a new status—it has now transitioned into the category of finished works. Forgotten for thirty years, it is now magnified, synthesizing the passage of time and sacralized almost like a relic. In his course ***Sur la Peinture*** in 1981, Gilles Deleuze explained that there is no blank page for the writer or blank canvas for the painter. The painter already has images, expectations, and projections in their mind before starting. The canvas is already loaded, even cluttered. "A canvas is not a blank surface (...). Before the painters start,

the canvas is already full (...). Full of what? Full of the worst (...). The problem will be to remove these invisible things, which have already taken the canvas.” This work could thus be seen as the visible hesitation, the doubt of the artist who continually postpones the act of painting and defers the decision. Thus, one must remove, erase, suppress. But erasure is not a simple act.

The brown canvas applied directly to the wall, *Rejected Painting*, is a cast-off of another kind. Initially painted for a specific exhibition, this piece became unusable due to a studio accident (it was found on the floor in the early morning). By reintegrating this work into his “official” corpus, Aballí questions the notion of success/failure, presentable/unpresentable. After removing the staples and stretcher, he shows the painting’s “skin” in its raw nudity. Spread out for all to see like a tortured figure in the public square, it is literally exhibited. At the same time, it reveals the simplicity of what a painting is—pigment with a binder applied to a canvas, typically stretched on a frame. Aballí does not show what will come to be; he shows the preliminaries of the painter’s gesture. In counterpoint to this rejected canvas, five canvases rest on the floor, partially turned against the wall, seemingly abandoned and forgotten. These bronze canvases were part of the experiments that led to the technical success of the castings. They are emblematic and can be considered a bridge between the various aspects of this exhibition. Questioning the process of painting and its display recurs in *Frame for a Frame*, which repeats the same idea: a frame protecting an empty frame. *Apparently empty*. Both absurd and amusing, this repetition can be seen as a *mise en abyme*.

Finally, on three walls of the room, a list of adjectives preceded by the adverb *Almost* unfolds, functioning as a sort of footnote. This list of words compiles notions the artist has shaped for this exhibition: *Almost invisible, almost white, almost perceptible...* They can be read as interpretations of the exhibited works or the exhibition itself. The “almost” emphasizes that something *is* without existing fully. Aballí plays the role of a disruptor. The word becomes image, and the image becomes commentary on the works. A complementarity emerges, and the eye oscillates between the displayed work and the text. The attentive visitor will even find an extension of this work elsewhere in the gallery.

Apparently Empty is an exhibition that synthesizes many of the questions that have animated Ignasi Aballí for years. By showing emptiness, exploring the prehistory of gestures and images, reevaluating forgotten works, and invoking ancestral craftsmanship and the nobility of materials, he speaks to us simply about painting and sculpture—therefore, about illusion and vanity.

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Ignasi Aballí (°1958) was born in Barcelona (Spain), where he currently lives and works.

He has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (Spain); MACBA, Barcelona (Spain); Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (Spain); Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (CAAC), Seville (Spain); Fundação de Serralves, Porto (Portugal); Meadows Museum, Dallas (United States); IKON Gallery, Birmingham (United Kingdom); ZKM, Karlsruhe (Germany); Pinacoteca de Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo (Brazil); Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (Colombia); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (Croatia).

His works are featured in numerous public and private collections, including the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (Spain); MACBA, Barcelona (Spain); Fundació La Caixa, Barcelona (Spain), and many other Spanish museums; PAMM - Pérez Art Museum, Miami (United States); Fundação de Serralves, Porto (Portugal); and CNAP - Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris (France).

Ignasi Aballí represented Spain at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. This participation marked a significant milestone in his career, solidifying his international recognition as a major figure in contemporary art. He has also participated in other renowned biennials, including the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), the 8th Sharjah Biennial (United Arab Emirates, 2007), the 11th Sydney Biennale (Australia, 1998), the 4th Guangzhou Triennial (China, 2012), and the 13th Cuenca Biennale (Ecuador, 2016). In 2015, Ignasi Aballí was awarded the prestigious Joan Miró Prize.