

# Lee Ufan and Claude Viallat: Encounter

Curated by Alfred Pacquement

2 June – 29 July, 2023  
5 Hanover Square  
London

Opening Reception: Friday 2 June, 6-8pm, coinciding with **London Gallery Weekend**



From left: Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Phenomenon and Perception B*), 1968/2022, Stone and glass, approx. 60 x 220 x 250 cm © Lee Ufan / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Claude Viallat, *1975/023*, 1975, Acrylic on fabric exposed to rain, 230 x 210 cm © Claude Viallat, courtesy Ceysson & Bénétière

*“It was undoubtedly the first time in the history of art that, concurrently, in different geographical locations, analogous tendencies were born.”*

– Lee Ufan

London—Pace Gallery is honoured to present *Lee Ufan and Claude Viallat: Encounter*, a two-person exhibition organised by the preeminent French curator, Alfred Pacquement. Spanning more than five decades, this exhibition will survey both artists’ enduring commitment to abstraction as a means of engaging philosophical ideas of time, space, and matter. At the centre of this dialogue, is an exploration of materiality from both a formal and metaphysical perspective. An illustrated exhibition catalogue featuring new texts by the artists and curator will be released by Pace Publishing later in the year.

Both born in 1936, Lee and Viallat have dedicated nearly seven decades to their respective practices and founded major artistic movements: Mono-ha in Japan and Supports/Surfaces in France, respectively. Despite differing geographies and contexts, Lee and Viallat are united by their rejection of traditional methods of art making and their innovative approach to materiality. Comprising painting, sculpture, and installation, Lee’s practice investigates the capacities of action and process as ways of engaging the relationships between the body and temporality. For Viallat, radical rethinking of materials led him to eschew the stretcher in order to treat the canvas as a material object, fundamentally subverting the conventions of painting. Encompassing both new and significant historical works – many of which have never been seen in the UK before – this exhibition is testament to these artists’ boundary breaking practices.

Lee and Viallat first met in Autumn 1971 when they were both included in the Biennale de Paris, an art festival showcasing young artists from around the world. In an interview conducted by Pacquement for the exhibition catalogue, Lee recalls the shock of discovering European and American art groups such as Arte Povera, Supports/Surfaces, and Anti-form: “It was undoubtedly the first time in the history of art that, concurrently, in different geographical locations, analogous tendencies were born.” Lee and Viallat kept in contact over the years, but when Lee opened his eponymous museum in Arles, France in 2022, they rekindled their friendship in earnest.

This exhibition, evocatively titled *Encounter*, marks the first time they have exhibited in conversation with one another.

Mono-ha, Japanese for ‘The School of Things’, rejected traditional methods and materials of artmaking in favour of the simplicity and inherent power of raw materials. Central to this thinking is the deconstruction of historical traditions and structures in order to rebuild anew. Indeed, Lee has explained his early *Relatum* sculptures as “a kind of resistance or protest against the institution or the politics of the time.” Born in Korea and having spent most of his life between Japan and France, Lee’s work is inspired by a distinct synthesis of Eastern and Western spiritual practices and beliefs. Considered the theoretician of the group, his celebrated career has been marked by several philosophical texts about contemporary art and culture. Whether it is the stroke of paint against a blank canvas or a natural stone against a cracked glass mirror, at stake in Lee’s work is the activated space between artwork, environment, and viewer. It is through this three-way interchange that Lee conjures ideas of time and space.

Just as Lee’s practice began as a rejection of convention, Viallat’s work is concerned with radically rethinking the nature of painting. Exclusively using found materials such as tarpaulin, rugs, or the fabric from an umbrella, Viallat’s practice is a rebellion against traditional methods of both making and viewing works of art. The Supports/Surfaces group freed painting from its support, reshaping or even removing the frame entirely. Artworks would be hung in unexpected ways – sometimes hanging from the ceiling or outside the gallery space altogether. In doing so, the boundary between artwork and environment is removed and, akin to Lee, the space that surrounds the work is activated, reimagining conditions of viewing.

The repetition of forms is a core facet of both artists’ practices. Lee’s painting series, such as *From Line*, *Correspondance*, or *Response*, vibrate with a visual rhythm as strokes of paint are placed in dialogue with one another. Likewise, throughout his career Viallat has developed a signature motif in which a rectangular form that he likens to the shape of a bone, echoes across the picture plane in a uniform grid. For both artists, the ordered structure of repetition has liberated their practices, allowing space to explore micro variations in the inherent qualities of their materials.

**Lee Ufan** (b. 1936, Kyongsang-namdo, South Korea) emerged as one of the leading figures of the Japanese avant-garde group Mono-ha, in the late 1960s. Emphasizing the relationships between space, perception, and object, his works develop from an appreciation of nature and the inherent qualities of his materials. Here, the action of repetitive minimal marks denotes an association between the body and temporality. Combining artistic practice with philosophical writing, Lee’s oeuvre is characterized by thoughtful and direct iterations of gestures, engaging the viewer in contemplation of abstract forms and vivid restraint, manifesting in sculpture, paintings, and works on paper.

**Claude Viallat** (b. 1936, Nîmes, France) is known for his contributions to the canon of modern painting through experimentation with texture, use of unstretched recycled fabrics, and mastery of color. A founding member of the Supports/Surfaces movement, Viallat studied at the École des Beaux-arts in Montpellier, France (1955–59), and the École des Supérieure des Beaux-arts, Paris (1962–63). While there, Viallat was exposed to the work of fellow artists such as Michel Parmentier and became interested in American Abstract Expressionist painters, above all Jackson Pollock. After completing his studies in Paris, Viallat leaned into abstraction and began experimentation with the formal elements of painting. A fundamental tenet of Viallat’s oeuvre is abandonment of the stretcher, allowing all kind of displays in the exhibition space and the use of materials such as draped canvas, tarpaulin, and recycled textiles such as sheets, rugs, curtains, and nets.

**Pace** is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a

robust global program— comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

Today, Pace has eight locations worldwide, including a European foothold in London and Geneva, and two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace’s long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace’s engagement with Silicon Valley’s technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as an office and viewing room in Beijing.

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