

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

# Wallpaper\*

## Jean Nouvel deconstructs the traditional triptych at Gagosian's Mayfair location

Ellen Himelfarb



*French architect Jean Nouvel stands in front of his work 'Miroir D', 2014, at the opening of his 'Triptyques' show at the Gagosian Gallery in London. Photography: Dave J Hogan/Getty Images for Gagosian Gallery*

Gagosian's sparse, slimline space in London's Mayfair is perfectly suited to stage the latest project by Jean Nouvel, the French architect and longtime Gagosian collaborator who often ventures into art and design.

Nouvel's Triptyques - hefty three-panelled mirrors oriented toward the gallery's glass façade - add many more dimensions to the room, pulling in shadow and throwing around light, animating the scene, no matter how static. A more substantial space would dilute their impact.

The three-panelled triptych format has obvious religious connotations, but Nouvel is ambivalent about that connection. Though he does acknowledge a link to stained glass, which can arouse a variety of sensations depending on the intensity of the interacting light, the purpose of the hinged structure, he stresses, is physical rather than metaphysical.

'The triptyques,' he says, 'are windows that open onto the interior. They open up spaces of their own and reflect the complexity of the existing architecture.' More important than looking at them like independent sculptures, he says, is 'to see them as something to integrate with the surroundings, like a contextual object. They change our perceptions of the architecture and create questions.'

He achieves this 'interactive system' with the mirrors, each topped with a sheet of clear glass to accentuate the perimeter and integrate light into the edges. 'This creates lines of light,' he says, 'like rays.' The movable mirrored panels amplify the light that gets caught in the volumes, creating flashes of radiance as well as mysterious shadows and ambiguous depths - effects Nouvel calls 'brilliant and aggressive'.

Nouvel is known for his employment of red, but here it is deep and ominous, bringing to mind Mark Rothko's murals for the Seagram Building in New York. The red interacts with yellows and aubergines, 'the green-ness of bottles, the dark blue of night, the deep red of the best wines.' Literally and metaphorically, they colour each different reflection 'like a live display'.

Knowing this, it can be intimidating to 'get inside' the windows, which are often angled forebodingly. But the scale of the pieces allows it and Nouvel encourages it. 'When you put your head close up in the sharp space, it is so surprising,' he says. 'Wonderfully unexpected.' A small room at the rear of the gallery is furnished with a single piece - Nouvel's 2011 Boîte à Outils, an oversized toolbox, opened to reveal his new shoe design for the Italian trainer brand Ruco Line. The architect has launched a limited-edition silver version of his Pure rubber and leather boots specially to complement the mirrors of the Triptyques show. The boots will be available only through the Gagosian's website.