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New from Robert Therrien: A Flagpole That's a Sculpture of a Picture
At Gagosian, a new sculpture by Robert Therrien takes distortions in two dimensions and renders them in three.

Blake Gopnik



©Robert Therrien. Photography by Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian

THE DAILY PIC (#1770): This is a photo of one of the stranger objects in the Robert Therrien show that opened Thursday at Gagosian gallery in New York, as the L.A. artist's first Manhattan outing in a decade.

The new sculpture I'm showing is a rendering of a flagpole, but distorted as though seen from above in steep perspective, with its top much bigger than its bottom. Or rather, that's precisely not what it is—people often make such claims about this kind of distorted sculpture, but in fact “perspective” is a device that only applies to realism practiced in two dimensions. (If a tour guide ever says that a sculpture on a Renaissance façade has been distorted to “correct” its perspective when seen from below, ask for your money back. Ditto if it's a university professor.)

To make a sculpture of a flagpole that looks just like a pole as seen from above ... you make a flagpole, and look at it from above.

The reason that Therrien's piece is so appealingly weird is because it doesn't in fact follow a coherent system for realism. It's really a sculpture of a picture of a flagpole that's seen from above. And that's a strange thing for anyone to sculpt