

The Best of 2023, The Worst of 2023  
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LOÏC RAGUÉNÈS, *Only a Grain of Sand*, An exhibition of works from the Estate, Clearing, New York, Dec. 16, 2023–Jan. 20, 2024



A modest, tender tribute to an artist who should be better known in this country, who passed away last year at the age of 54. Whenever I encountered his optical, “Neo-pointillist” paintings and drawings over the years in France, it was love at first sight. I immediately connected his imploded, dot-patterned picture-making with that of Alex Brown (who also died too soon, at 52), attracted to how both wanted the eye of the viewer to work to discern the image, and if it eluded identification, to recognize that the act of looking should always be active, that even fixed images are fleeting. Raguénès caught my attention with wondrous, large-scale wall paintings, one of which I helped him to realize—nearly cross-eyed by the time it was

done—for an exhibition of mine in Switzerland in 2014. In this show at Clearing, maybe to mark the season, there was a wall painting of a pole bear, a threatened species.

After the complexity of the half-toned, optical work, I wasn’t sure what to make of the reductive “wave” paintings that followed. Now, I can appreciate these more meditative images, how they are also durational, and in a way not so dissimilar to his earlier work. Other modes of concentration, on other wavelengths, we might say. And then there are the small format paintings of the solar system, softly rendered, tempera on canvas. One, featuring Saturn in the upper right-hand corner, made in the year before the artist passed away, he titled, *Times’ Up*.