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Sexshops and Siren Calls

The Must-See Show in London This Week



Tal R, *Paris Chic* (2017) © Tal R. Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro, London

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While the subject matter is provocative, there's nothing obviously titillating about Tal R's "Sexshops" paintings, [on show at Victoria Miro](#) (until 20 December). Their appeal is more slow burning and complex.

For the past few years the Copenhagen-based artist has been painting sex shops in Europe, America and the Middle East, often based on photographs sent from friends.

His focus is always on their exteriors, with the façades, signage and architectural details of establishments called Babylon, Venus, Dirty Dick and Paris Chic distilled and flattened into repetitive, visually arresting patterns.

The paintings' siren call is intensified by the use of pure pigment mixed with rabbit-skin glue, which gives the works such chromatic intensity that they almost appear to be backlit. The muted earthiness of the palette seems somehow out of kilter with the garish connotations of sex shops, something Tal R plays up.



Tal R, *Venus* (2017) © Tal R. Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro, London

The works straddle a line between abstraction and literal representation, though their come-hither titles are a constant, deliberate reminder of what we are looking at. Or rather, attempting to look at: we're never actually allowed inside. What fascinates Tal R is "the idea of something being withheld", and this show is underpinned by a denial of access.

Some of the works are almost aggressively unyielding: *The Pleasure* (2017) offers anything but, instead showing a tightly closed door set in the center of a yellow brick wall, its snapped-shut hinges like cartoonish shark's teeth.

Other works are more teasing: the viewer's eye is guided through a jaunty threshold of red and white stripes and bright planes of color towards an obdurate black aperture in *Venus* (2017). Likewise, the kaleidoscopic surfaces of *House 44* (2015) and the shimmering glass of *Temple Bar* (2017) present visual treats that are ultimately impregnable.

Like the sex shops they depict, these paintings stoke fantasies in the absence of the real thing. The joy and power of the works comes from the ways in which one's imagination is stimulated when access is denied.

