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Emil Michael Klein

Darkotic

December 16, 2017 until February 18, 2018
Media Conference: Friday, December 15, 2017, 11am
Opening: Friday, December 15, 2017, 6pm

Press Release

Darkotic presents a selection of the newest work by the Swiss artist Emil Michael Klein (b.1982). It is a matter of abstract painting, and one initially understands it wrongly. Not that it is not abstract. And naturally, it orients itself around the eminent history of the genre. According to this, you will be able to draw out the relation it bears to other painters. Painters and art in general thrive from this, it is through comparisons and differences that sense and meaning, but also criticism, are established. And obviously none of this functions without composition, basecoats, oils, dispersion, canvas and thought.

But in truth Klein's painting evolves in any case just as much from wood-carving, graffiti and tags. This is the origin of his painting, one that is no longer bound to a tradition. Rather, it is more craft, more an unsentimental mastery of the wall and a covering over of the canvas. And to get there, the artist has, so-to-speak, taken the opposite route by first training as a woodcarver. Unlike a painted canvas, a wooden sculpture is created by 'stripping away', by removing wood. But, in contrast to applied colour, this process is irrevocable. What is gone is gone. The history of art, that we celebrate as a series of triumphs, is therefore also understood as a tragedy: a never-ending number of works are failures and are lost forever – which is as it should be. In Klein's case, the removal and elimination of material has sharpened his eye and his hand and his understanding of the three-dimensional, and this lead him to the thinking that a painting can also be a sculpture, as layerings and as removals.

For painting is first a layering, a covering over, a disappearance and therefore a cancellation. Canvas is blanketed over and replaced by something else. This results in a to and fro, a before and after, and over and under that is carried along by the hope and conviction that through this something will take hold. That is but one of the basic kicks and contradictions of spraying and tagging: to cover over, simply to show everyone that you've covered over. For this reason this art also functions poorly on canvas and in the museum: anyone can cover a canvas in colour, its like bringing an owl to Athens. But outside speediness is king, time is of the essence, the train will drive off or the security will come. Likewise is sentimentality misplaced here: for everyone knows that the work might be gone again by the next morning. The latter is precisely what drives Klein's work, it is borne by a total surrender that does not hold to something definite. This makes it solemn at the same time as uncannily light. This is revealed in the newest series of rose-coloured pictures and how the signature USP (unique selling point) is simultaneously celebrated, parodied and transmuted. Or better still: in which the signature takes on the role of a figure, though there is frankly nothing as abstract as letters. They are a form, a standard and more anonymous than any colour. They are both picture, logo of the artist and certificate of authenticity, for the image they are mostly irrelevant, but here they are on the edge and in the centre.

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However, as Cézanne showed beautifully, sometimes the canvas is right, not the colour or the application of the colour or the motif, whether mountain or letter. For sight itself, as Cézanne demonstrated over and over, is dependent on the emptiness, on the surrounding space. A mountain is only a mountain because there is nothing surrounding it. This is referenced in both a figurative and literal sense by the places where the canvas remains without paint. This was radical for the time and clearly still is today. This emptiness manifests for Klein not just on the canvas, but also in the exhibition itself. He has 'doubled' four metres of the longest wall in the exhibition, this means he has screwed a wall to the wall in order to make an emptiness visible, without which there is neither a picture nor an exhibition. The reality is that it is constantly shifting, that it is never absolute, rather it is subject to history, space and thought. This also applies to art, it is a brutal business which explains why some sink without trace while others suddenly surface, because there is an empty space that makes them necessary. Klein's pictures are conscious of all this, they define themselves decisively through this to and fro, through cancellation and doubling, triumphing and repenting. On first glance this seems self-evident and banal, but this dominates - in case you may have forgotten - our everyday life and makes of it what it always also is, a thing dark and chaotic, *Darkotic*.

Daniel Baumann

Emil Michael Klein, born 1982, lives and works in Zürich.

The artist book *EMK*, designed by Theo Schifferli, will accompany the exhibition.

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