

Otis Jones - Bret Slater**30.8. - 4.10.2014**

annex14 is delighted to be showing works by two American painters, Otis Jones (*1946, Texas) and Bret Slater (*1987, Bronx, NY). The show constitutes a kind of generation project. Slater began assisting Jones in 2011 and this triggered an exchange that continued to develop and soon revealed parallels in their artistic ethos. Over the course of time, however, the aesthetic and thematic differences between these two artists, each of whom can be located in his own way within American "abstract" painting, also came to light.

Otis Jones is one of the first generation of abstract artists who developed their own ideas in an intellectual climate shaped by the critic Clemens Greenberg. A painting that wished to be taken seriously therefore had to somehow adhere to his demand for unity of form and content, respectively self-referentiality. Otis Jones's painting seems at first sight to fulfil this aspiration. It takes seriously, and reflect subtly on, the conditions of painting. Attention is variously drawn to paint and brushstroke; through overpainting, working with sandpaper and applying modelling paste, the consistently small paintings acquire an additional meditative depth. The coloured lines, by contrast, often appearing in twos, are somewhat confusing and contrary to the doctrine. As are the circles, which on the one hand structure the planes, that is, bring out the centre, the middle line or the corners and bring the figure-ground topic into play. On the other hand, the circles and lines seem to hover on the plane or in the pictorial space and to possess an almost magic power of attraction. Like in icons, the material reality of Otis Jones's paintings points beyond them. In addition to what it tells us about the history of painting, it also opens up a mental space that harbours the possibility of facilitating self-encounter through dialogue.

Bret Slater's small object-like paintings also thrive on a clear reduced formal idiom. Slater applies the paint out beyond the pictorial plane resulting in irregular edges, or uses carriers with rounded corners. He applies or pours layer on layer of paint in numerous working stages, thus achieving a plasticity with an astonishing, almost overwhelming immediacy. Brilliantly vibrant colours and earth shades contrast with and heighten one another. His artistic idiom is reminiscent both of recent American painting and of Pop art. When looking at Bret Slater's paintings, however, not least because of his compositional approach to structuring the planes, one experiences an immediate feeling of familiarity/intimacy. Slater creates essential multi-layered objects charged with an emblematic and symbolic force, objects that are abstract and at the same time animated counterparts.

Elisabeth Gerber