

Stéphane Ducret, Bret Slater

31.8. - 12.10.2013

Opening: Friday, 30.8.2013, 6 pm

annex14 is delighted to be able to show new works by Stéphane Ducret (*1970, CH) and Bret Slater (*1987, Bronx, NY/USA). This is the first time either of the artists has been shown at this gallery. Irrespective of the different generations, what these two artists have in common is their handling of the medium of painting as an open experimental field and their non-figurative idiom. Ducret, who lived in Buenos Aires from 2006 to 2012 before returning to Geneva, exhibits an affinity to the neo-Rococo movement of the late 1980s; in Slater, who lives in New York, there is an unmistakable resonance with minimal art, colour field and hard edge painting. What is more, both artists go beyond the self-referential framework of the medium to discover surprising visual approaches to the issue of how and whether the everyday, the existential, can be tangibly conveyed by means of abstraction.

What strikes the viewer about the small format works by Bret Slater in the exhibition, mostly no larger than 18 x 18 x 3 cm, is first of all their freshness and directness, both reminiscent of American Pop Art. The colours, the vibrant neon tones as well as the saturated and subdued shades, radiate out with incredible intensity, while the object-like character of the works, the rounded corners, the thickness of the carrier and the paint extending beyond the edges of the canvas, transforms each one into an enthralling counterpart for the viewer. This directness, this physical presence and emotional impact, constitutes one of the challenges that make Slater's painting so contemporary: it is haptic, iconic and sensual.

Slater refers form and plane to one another with a sure sense of tension and balance, clearly demarcating them not least by means of his relief-like paint application that enables the interplay between "figure and ground" to take place at two levels. Various associations, both archaic and everyday, are conjured up by his choice of forms, which are often described as "teeth" and usually remain open towards the edges. It is no coincidence that Slater speaks of painting as an alchemical process, a transformation of matter into the presence of things: "Like us, each painting grows into its individuality. They exist in the world as inanimate beings with living souls."

The most recent works by Stéphane Ducret on show in the exhibition, in acrylic spray paint on paper, are part of an extensive series that also includes works on canvas. The large sheets are first and foremost the visual trace of concentrated action, of a conceptually prepared process that is driven by an inner, concealed rhythm and by the dynamism of the spray can. Ducret himself describes them as vague souvenir images "souvenirs flous".

For Ducret, human psychology, the motives behind his action and his memory, are of central importance, taking into account existential thought, which assumes, among other things, that man shapes his own existence. This is also the background of the complexity of his free handling of ornamentation, which eschews neither the beautiful nor the decorative. Like artists around 1900, Ducret is also fascinated by the language of pure form, lines and colours, and above all, their potential to transport worldliness. Ducret diffracts their utopian content, however, by also considering the later developments such as Abstract Expressionism, or minimal art's serial processes and their ornamentation, and finally, art's engagement with this in the 1980s.

Elisabeth Gerber