

## Christian Vetter - Painting

25.1. - 1.3.2014

annex14 is delighted to be starting the New Year with an exhibition of works by Christian Vetter. After his expansive installation *Painting in the Era of Capitalism* at the Helmhaus in Zürich last year, the artist is now concentrating again on issues relating to painting. *Paint and gesture at right angles on the plane*: these succinct terms could be used to describe the artist's current paintings and overpainted photographs.

Christian Vetter's approach to painting is that of a later generation. Liberated from the dogma of innovation and from the "anything goes" of postmodernism, he avails of this regained free scope to make painting in its historical dimensions the subject of in-depth reflection again. Bearing this in mind, we experience his paintings as part of a historical process. They can be interpreted metaphorically as stores of memories, as "a window onto the world", with the latter opening wide onto the present.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that in his new relatively small works major importance is attached to a reduction to the two shades of black and silver. Black is usually at the beginning of the creative process, being the colour with which Christian Vetter sometimes completely primes his canvases. This initial decision proves to be extremely multifaceted. It can be understood as a radical act of extinction, obliteration, but at the same time as a means of transforming the plane into an open picture space.

Using the most reduced gestures possible and the colour silver, the artist evokes compositional approaches and brings to mind light and reflection as themes in painting. And where black and silver blend, where space and plane interpenetrate, the perceptive eye can intuit the multilayered relationships and meanings of the figure-ground theme, which pervade the history of painting to this very day. When considered today, such paintings again raise the existential question of social space, of a value system which accommodates our sense perception, thinking and actions.

For his large-format black-and-white overpaintings of photographs Christian Vetter uses photographic material of his own. These photographs are usually ones that dissipate the gaze, for example, close-ups of a forest with no horizon, of all-over structures, so to speak, or of closed interior spaces. The artist intervenes in these pigment prints on paper by means of well-placed brushstrokes. As with a proscenium stage, we stand in front of the – transparent – fourth wall and thus inevitably see ourselves in the position of the reflecting audience. We become observers of a history

play and, as in the theatre, we discover the mute signs that point beyond what is depicted to something absent ... like the solitary fir tree, whose physiognomy extends far into historical Nordic landscape painting, that is to say, into a past when the relationship between man, nature and God was newly conceived, and into a present where economic constraints have become a widespread creed.

It is this being permeable to the past, without ever losing sight of the present, that distinguishes Christian Vetter's painting. We are repeatedly surprised by the simple yet carefully selected hypotheses he uses to successfully conceive painting in a comprehensive dimension and link collective and personal interests.

Elisabeth Gerber