

TANJA POL GALERIE

TOM HOWSE
SECOND HAND TOAD POEMS
17/02/17 - 28/04/17

“Painting is always abstract.” The title of a recent exhibition at Munich’s Pinakothek der Moderne, this statement also serves as an apt introduction for the following thoughts on Tom Howse’s second solo show. Although Paul Cézanne already described art as a pattern parallel to nature at the end of the 19th century, the question of representation in painting has continued to be a subject ever since early modernism. In his extremely large works, Tom Howse provides us with an opportunity to reconceptualize the conditions of painting today—or perhaps not to.

Tom Howse offers us a view of supposed visual spaces in which cats, breasts, teapots, and plants float about entirely without meaning in black, white, but never empty space. His visual spaces emerge through painting, but are also voided by painting. On a carpet that consists of a pattern of brushstrokes, in other words, very emphatically presenting paint in an analogous manner on canvas, there is a chair, the cushion of which does just the opposite: an illusionistic, curved (virtual) round edge takes the gestural brushstrokes of the carpet pattern ad absurdum. The directness and lightness with which Tom Howse approaches a surface with the dimensions 240 x 350 cm is both shocking and a relief. It frees us from questions of representation, visual logic, storytelling, considerations of foreground and background, and other issues that again and again define but also limit our approach to painting.

All the same, we find allusions to stories, for things get quite wild in some of the pictures. “Objects” like teapots have faces, and seemingly animate they can spit fluids from their spouts. This fluid looks like brushstrokes, and that is what’s offered to the beholder. The humor being expressed here is also a relief, perhaps that’s what beholder needs to allow himself to enjoy the radicalness of this painting.

The large vertical picture at the gallery’s entrance is painted onto a quilted canvas that already provides a structure before any paint is applied. Here, there is also a carpet in the visual space, also assembled using pieces of fabric like the image itself. This strategy of doubling, if taken to its logical conclusion, leads to the dissolution of the question of what is represented in the painting. What you see is what you get.

Tom Howse, born in Chester in 1988, lives and works in London.