



Aanant & Zoo

MERLIN JAMES

PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, PRINTS

May 03 - July 05 2014

Opening: Friday, May 02, 19 – 21 Uhr

—

British painter Merlin James (born 1960 in Cardiff, Wales – based in Glasgow, Scotland) is notable for his often simple compositions, and the restraint and stillness typical of his images. His paintings, usually in a small format, frequently consist of few basic elements, sometimes centered on a figure or single object. Narrative content is not foregrounded, but a subject or ‘theme’ of some kind may be named in the title. One consistent objective is an approach to and examination of the intrinsic qualities of painting as an activity and a cultural entity, though this concern is never the whole *raison d’être* of the work.

Merlin James draws from art-historical tradition in subtle and reflexive ways: His subjects range from landscapes and figurations, over interiors and still life, to non-figurative compositions. Form and formlessness, spatial illusion and surface, as well as transparency and materiality often co-exist in a state of fluid transition in James’ painterly and graphic work. His numerous references to particular styles, epochs and artists should not, however, be understood as some kind of postmodern appropriative strategy but rather a form of reminiscing, taking on a particular and highly personal character.

Still lifes such as *Tulips* (2010-14), which focus on simple and familiar everyday objects, and interiors like *Room* (1990), restrict themselves to a few spatial allusions and position the visualized subjects on the verge of abstraction and dissolution. They merge into the surrounding color fields’ haze, or coalesce with the ambient space. In the case of the *Sex Paintings*-series, something similar can be observed in the way human subjects are depicted, too: despite the intimate close-up view, what remains is an inscription of the distance of fading memories. A sense of the impalpable also runs through his graphic art, pervading the often reduced, linear sketches. The artist’s works on paper have been exhibited relatively rarely and form a major element of the current show.

James’ engagement with physical materiality and immateriality in painting, a medium dealing in illusion, emerges distinctly in his technical experiments. Some examples: He integrates materials such as hair, elements made from reed or smallwooden objects into the piece, cuts into the canvas

*Aanant & Zoo*

or mixes sawdust in with the paint so as to allow certain areas of the painting to come to the fore through haptic-material surface structure. With some of his most recent works, James arrives at a point of synthesis regarding his engagement with the phenomena of transition of plane and space: Using transparent materials turns the image area into a diaphanous veil, situated between opaqueness and transparency, allowing for the visible parts of the wooden frame structure, as well as the space beyond the canvas, to become part of the work. In so doing, the artist sensitizes the audience's gaze to the conflation of the apparent with the factual, offering new ways of looking at the mediality of the image.

Text by Julius Lehmann

—
Merlin James lives and works in Glasgow. Most recently, his works were exhibited in solo-shows at Kunstverein Freiburg (2013), Kunst-Werke (KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2013), and at Parasol Unit, Foundation for Contemporary Art in London (2013), among others. Aanant & Zoo is pleased to welcome Merlin James to the gallery's program.