

Charming refractiveness

It's unusual if along with an invitation, an Art Manifesto lies in the mail. And also remarkable is the line-up coming with it: Gary Stephan, John Miller and Klaus Merkel all together in one exhibition? In any case, this combination relates to the offensive refractoriness of the invitation's manifesto, in which Gary Stephan sounded the relationship between text and picture, the language of art, and the artist's role with engraved words. Is that clear? Well, a theoretical foundation of art seems to be extremely outdated in current galleries (and not only in Berlin). On the other hand, a specific market submitted to separate mediatory conditions has long emerged for "Theory as Art", a fact that makes this gallery show a very sensitive event. Indeed, **'After all that can be said'** drives a huge wedge between them. Surely not only the individual works with their extremely independent and particular handwriting take care of that. For instance, the **Ex Hall** by Klaus Merkel, a canvass in horizontal format, bucked up to a kind of working desk in a sought-for coloration. The composition consists of visibly set precise, seemingly abstract motives and in addition, like accidentally "lost" traces of work, paint drops etc. Also the small particles of the design set in the foundation over pink-coloured, city map-like patterns reveals rapidly that one is dealing here with a systematic practice of painting. In fact, it is applied with such consistency – which can become a problem of reception – that goes far beyond the limits of trademark and recognition. Born 1953 in Freiburg, the artist constructs painting – formally to be understood literally, in any case – as discourse, by comprehending his paintings again and again as indexical entities, as material for free combinations, taking from structural methods. Despite its hermetically sounding description, its look is razor-sharp and treats taste or appeal with sovereign indifference while purposely expecting too much.

On the contrary, the untitled paintings by Gary Stephan (born 1942), hereabouts hardly shown, captivate through, well, downright beauty. Especially the early works from before 1990, with their recurrent fine, ornamental-organic vocabulary of forms set in backdrops in the style of past masters incite one to "like it" spontaneously. Light, subtle surface processing and visual enthrallment do play a big role here. But it is also clear that Gary Stephan reformulates his scenic trial order, his picture concepts radically anew all the time. Tried and tested ways seem to be allowed for questioning instead of a stylistic solidification. However – the works still do not become ironic in their continuing reciprocal orientation of being "always different". Just as they stay resistant to linguistic identification. Stephan's elegant object, traversed by cavity and a mix of materials as well as kept together by a cautiously modelled gypsum bowl speaks volumes...

The outstanding phenomenon about the threesome kombi is that Gary Stephan, who arranged the show as curator and dealt with selecting the works, succeeds in making insecure the individual, highly specific work designs vis-à-vis each other and to liberate the material, setting it free. This becomes clear through John Miller's (born 1954) role in this exhibition, because he manages to unite especially sustainably – and successfully – a closely led theoretical as well as artistic production for this method. One of his early wall embossments covered with "John-Miller-Brown" hangs in the show next to a deserted photograph from his "Middle of the Day" – series, which takes up the unexplainable suspense of shots made by conceptualisation artists like Robert Barry or Douglas Huebler. Placed in this way, however, it breaks

up – despite the balanced harmony of the presentation — the refractive appearance of the show a little to the outside.

Following the solo exhibition of Elmar Zimmermann from Karlsruhe, **After All That Can Be Said** therefore is another sign of life of the sporadic, but self-asserted activities of Gallery Kienzle & Gmeiner. If things go on like this....