

Paint Traces

Short Distance To Now at the Kienzle & Gmeiner gallery

“Painting is dead” was the credo of the 60’s in New York

“So what?” retorted a group of young painters – and painted away. They painted for what they were worth, experimenting and developing new, radical definitions for the painting medium. In its group exhibition “Short Distance To Now” the Kienzle & Gmeiner gallery is displaying until September 26 the work of eight artists who caused an uproar in the New York art scene between 1967 and 1975.

Cesar Paternosto’s 1972 work, “Sagetario”, is a canvas which had been primed but left otherwise untouched, whilst the left and right external edges of the stretched canvas feature bright colour fields. By choosing the narrowest edge of the picture-bearer for his painting, he took the traditional observation of art and reduced it *ad absurdum*.

“I always had the feeling that a painting is more than its contours, that a field or a force is contained within it.”

Like Paternosto, who brought abstraction to its own zero point with his empty canvas, Harriet Korman also resisted the minimalist ideology of the mainstream.

Disassociating herself from artists like Agnes Martin, Korman rejected any idea of perfection and emphasized artisanship by leaving drops of acrylic paint and irregular lines in her work as witness to the painting process. Her work can be understood as a manifesto, a defence of live painting.

The 1971 canvas of Louise Fishman, thick with paint, might be described as poetry for the senses. It incorporates knotted strings, strings with which the feminist literally binds herself into the tradition of female handicrafts. In another oil-on-wood work of 1974, Fishman breaks with the conventional rectangular format, cutting it and leaving the incisions conspicuously open. Using a paint knife she lends the surface an aura of life.

“I don’t talk of painting paintings, but rather of making them,” said artist Jack Witten. “The verb is not to paint, but to make.” His 1974 work features a severely stressed canvas. Construction, deconstruction and reconstruction are the themes which dominate his work.

To a backdrop of a society in the process of liberal transformation, art changed during the late 60s and early 70s. Damage, omission, materials such as latex, and the influence of the new media were to make a lasting impression on the character of painting. Galerist Jochen Kienzle saw the “High Times- Hard Times” exhibition at New York’s ICI in 2006 and was enchanted by it. “We have been pursuing a comparable programme in our gallery for decades, and therefore I did my utmost to bring these artist, some of whom are unknown to the European public, to Berlin.”

“Short Distance To Now” is the title of the exhibition. No distance, however can be felt. To this day, these once visionary works still possess an astonishing radiance and vitality.

Closing: 27. September, 19:30