

TANJA POL GALERIE

Robert Elfgén
Von Meeren und Flüssen
("On Oceans and Rivers")
18/02/16 - 02/04/16

For his second solo show at Tanja Pol Galerie, Robert Elfgén (born in Wesseling in 1972, based in Cologne and Berlin) once again combines painting and installation. In his new paintings, he combines landscape motifs with portraits of women: female figures gazing, smoking, or training at the ballet bar. A floating woman's head without a body looks out into the distance in an almost glowing color from ultramarine to violet. It is a gaze in all directions, back to the future, with a very compelling presence. Elfgén's vertical format landscapes that he collages in part with plant elements on wood treated with stain and ink are disturbingly beautiful. Beyond explicit moral or political messages, without reference to media events, he disturbs in a very subtle way.

The technique of the paintings reveals how they emerged—we see parts of plants, wood grain, and a shiny finish—and yet it remains strangely puzzling how the works came about. Several paintings recall a landscape photograph, while another landscape reveals an affinity to Baroque Dutch maritime paintings with its low horizon and thick, shiny varnish. The motifs and the formal language are very simple, and yet one finds oneself confronted with a virtually overly complex message, landscape, beauty, longing, the human figure, glowing colors are the parameters of this exhibition. How far can we extend the concept of beauty before the work becomes too ready to please or kitsch? In the titles, Elfgén returns to a strategy he has often used before: assigning titles to the complete new work group from a closed context. All titles are the names of boats or ships. Here as well, the title refers to a traditional motif of longing.

The exhibition features but a single male figure, perhaps the artist's alter ego. Bending over, he looks at a pile of letters on the floor, which can be recognized by the beholder. If painting is a different way of speaking, as the artist Markus Bacher puts it, this work is perhaps the key work in the exhibition.

Robert Elfgén had his first solo show at Bonner Kunstverein in 2004, and a later individual show at Kunstverein Oldenburg in 2015. In 2016, Leopold-Hoesch-Museum in Duren will be dedicating a large-scale solo show to his work (catalogue). His works are included in international collections, including Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf; Zabłudowicz Collection, London; Sammlung Goetz, Munich; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, Florida.

Robert Elfgén is represented by Sprüth Magers Berlin London Los Angeles, Tanja Pol Galerie and Marianne Boesky, New York.