

Jensen

FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

brown and cheap-looking, showing obvious signs of the wall were still painted a smarmy pink hue left over from the previous show. Nearly all of the temporary walls added for that occasion, however, had been taken down—but the rough patches where the seams used to be remained unfinished. The benches, soiled spots and greasy strips were still visible from earlier visitors leaning their heads. And if you looked closely, you might have noticed out-of-place holes and awkwardly patched gaps between the pictures, the traces of failed hanging techniques. The exhibition space looks like this fourth-floor gallery space in which a show is actually in progress.

Work being presented in these musty-smelling, some-times resemble conventional painting. Sergej Jensen painting in the usual sense: Only in the rarest cases are they created using paint and brushes, and even if he does happen to make a picture in this way, he's often likely to hang it facing the wall. For the most part, Jensen paints using weather and a washing machine, sunlight and bleach, or diamond dust. He covers his stretchers with found or weathered textiles, which might be either coarse burlap or the finest silk, then sews them up with needle and thread—apparently offhandedly—to create abstract compositions. And yet these pictures remain recognizable as paintings, although paintings of the second degree.

African Market, 2008, for example, features a rough fabric applied to its stretchers, its surface showing traces of spilled bleach. But this isn't at all what one might take it for at first glance; it appears an energetically executed, abstract-expressive painterly gesture. Nor does it embody the diametrical opposite that's become so common in the art world: that

conceptual control and coolheaded reserve that is meant to undercut painting's status as the paradigmatic genre of the 20th century. Jensen's painting is somewhere in the middle. One could describe it as a project of skillful *laissez-faire*, finding a sort of "*peinture automatique*": an intentional "letting be" that is already there and a spontaneous "letting be" of the medium, reducing painting to bare bones. Sometimes, as in the appropriately titled *Untitled* (2009), Jensen takes the process of reduction as far as the paint seeping through the thin fabric.

The consequence of this technique of letting be and leaving be is an exhibition space that itself has been let be, rendering it a potential painterly gesture: the old carpeting, the wall, the superfluous nails. All of these things create a tension with the paintings with their presentation, a perfectly balanced tension of imperfection. In Jensen's work, one finds an understanding of how to create an effect, a baffling precision, and an infallible sense of placement. What at first appears a rigorously intellectual undertaking reveals itself to be

filled with sensual qualities, a comprehensive aesthetic document of the most radical stylistic intention. Every seam is right where it belongs: painting as a made-to-measure deconstructed suit.

—Dominikus Müller

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

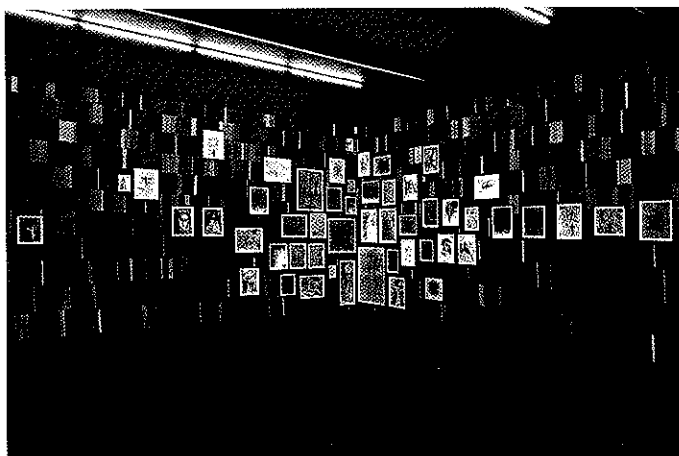
HAMBURG AND BERLIN

Carsten Fock

GALERIE KATHARINA BITTEL/GALERIE SEPTEMBER

In two simultaneous shows mounted in Hamburg and Berlin, Carsten Fock presented his latest work in the form of all-over installations that group drawings, paintings, and wall treatments into coherent ensembles. The shows shared concerns but did not merely represent formal variations on a theme. It's better to think of them as two separate, self-contained pictures—and this is precisely what characterizes Fock's artistic perspective: having space come into its own as a picture and vice versa. "Earlier, my individual wall paintings functioned autonomously," Fock has said. "Now, for the first time, the entire room has become something like a meta-picture." Fock's immersive meta-pictures do not, however, downgrade the individual works integrated within them to mere placeholders. On the contrary, these ensembles sustain and focus the specific qualities of Fock's framed drawings and paintings. This crossing of boundaries between individual works is underlined by the fact that in some cases the individual pieces themselves display a distinctly tectonic structure. Fock formerly tended to use typography as a basis for his images but now increasingly uses freer gestures. Figurative allusions emerge as well: a hint of landscape, for instance, or motifs drawn from Christian iconography. Fock aspires to achieve a precise equilibrium between reduced pictorial gesture and shading that lies somewhere between Hartung-style *informel* and the suggestion of three-dimensionality. The emphasis on process helps each painting and drawing develop its own characteristic all-over rhythmic structure.

The two shows put these principles into practice in differently tempered but equally valid ways—which was what made their juxtaposition so interesting. In Hamburg, Fock created a somewhat cooler, abstract chamber with a spread of wall paintings that rhythmically alternated between violet and black, along with a third wall painted a dense black. Taking this backdrop as his starting point, he implemented a hanging strategy of ironic self-reference—as when a framed pastel drawing was placed in isolation and repeated, on a smaller scale, the motif and color tone of the wall on which it was hung. The



View of "Carsten Fock," 2009. Galerie September.

Berlin installation, by contrast, had an almost sacred feel to it, suggesting a chapel devoted to abstract painting: The wall painting, regular in structure but multicolored, evoked light streaming in through church windows, and an abstracted picture of Christ against a violet background on one of the central walls contributed to the spiritual effect. And yet all of this remains not so much a theme as a template, applied to produce first a picture and then a pictorial space. "Transcendence without pathos" is Fock's own term for it.

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

ZURICH

Martin Soto Climent

KARMA INTERNATIONAL

The site-specific show titled "The Intimate Revolt"—quoting the book of the same name by Julia Kristeva—literally closed itself off from the viewer: The gallery was locked and could not be entered. Instead, one had to view the show through a long rectangular slot set into an interior wall that separated the exhibition space from the gallery's entryway. How disorienting to find oneself standing before a locked door during a gallery's open hours, and to have to view the show from a distance! The exhibition was thus reduced to a framed picture. We wandered through it with our eyes rather than our bodies.

Mexican artist Martin Soto Climent is known for his graceful manipulations of found objects, which he combines, recasts, and arranges to create poeticized and eroticized artifacts not unlike Surrealist *objets*. In his first solo show in Switzerland, he presented two series. "Phantasy of an Immigrant Dream," 2009, consists of seven worn-looking broomsticks whose brush ends have been replaced with both new and frayed hairpieces. Leaning against the wall—gaunt sculptures threatening to topple over—they lend a rhythmic structure to the space. Along with these, Soto Climent also presented samples from a series that has been in progress for quite some time now: "Tights on Canvas," 2007–. True to the title, these are white, medium-format canvases, each of which has one or two pairs of nylon stockings stretched across it. Some of the stocking feet hang down like dripping paint, and the series as a whole makes reference to both abstract painting and the female nude.

Like many of the everyday objects used by Soto Climent, stockings, brooms, and fake hair carry multiple layers of association. A title like "Phantasy of an Immigrant Dream" helps give those associations a more specific focus: The figure of the immigrant typifies a

subject with utopian hopes that gradually wane as hardships exceed the fulfillment of these dreams. Are the worn hairpieces melancholy signs standing in for the longing for another identity and a more glamorous reality? Can the brooms on this polished stone floor, which no one is allowed to walk on and sully, be understood as an allegory for social obligations taken to the point of absurdity? The separation between subjectivity and

objectivity, representation and reality, is performed here peering through the window. But the weight of such topics by the charm of the objects themselves, which, like all of Soto's works, perform a balancing act between melancholy, and humor. The stocking pictures, with their naked displayed legs, join the brooms with hairpieces in marking of the body and the insistence of its desires. And it was well as discomfiting to be forced into the role of voyeur through the window. With this estranged gaze, Soto Climent us to confront the way in which we go through the life blindly, as our perceptions and imaginations become more impoverished.

Translated from German by O

BRUSSELS

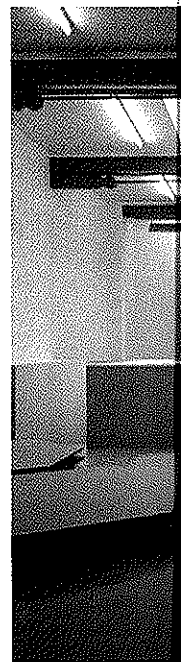
Richard Venlet

ELISA PLATTEAU GALERIE

Walking through the door of Elisa Platteau Galerie, one Venlet's *Untitled (Claustra)* (all works 2009), a white grille that stretched from the floor nearly to the ceiling, immediately to the right and parallel to the wall. Behind its bars was a large map, square in format and obviously aged, preserved within a frame, apparently showing a neighborhood in Rome. Across from this single adornment, a narrow and steep staircase led to the second floor. The character of the space there was completely different: The floor was covered with the aptly subtitled *Untitled (40 hexagon floor elements)*—carpeted wooden modules, randomly arranged. At times, they formed piles of two or three; there were gaps between them, but these were too short to constitute passageways, and the hexagonal platforms were too wide to step over, so that you had to climb over them when necessary. Moving gingerly in order to get around the room, you came upon the presence of another white grille, also *Untitled (Claustra)*, hung on the wall corresponding to the one on which its twin was seen on the

The contrast between these two floors, augmented by the in lighting (muted downstairs, abundant upstairs), was of distinct modes of perception were elicited. Yet both were subjected to stumbling blocks: The entire environment placed under the sign of impediment. Access was not permitted; diverted; both the eye and the body were constrained and thereby suggesting a narrative reading of the exhibition encouraged by the return of the grille at the end of the corridor a story in two acts, in which the protagonist, after so long perceived that the initial object of his quest had evaporated.

The map displayed on the ground floor, a drawing by Battista Piranesi, dates from 1762. It is not the property of the gallery but was lent to him by the University of Ghent; it was for



View of "Martin Soto Climent," 2009.

