

John Zurier - Late Summer

4. September – 16. October 2021, Opening: 3. September 2021, 2–7pm

A hint of melancholy, a touch of "la dolce vita" resonates in the name of the current exhibition at the annex14 gallery: "Late Summer". Great emotions that we all like to recall. Yet the powerful title of the show of paintings by the US-American artist John Zurier (*1956 in Santa Monica, CA, USA) also involves the viewers' temptation to rediscover said late summer in the works on show. But how can the essence of that time period be visually captured and communicated?

It becomes evident quite quickly that the oil and tempera paintings by this artist convey these contents not through painted motifs or anecdotes, but by means of formless structures and diffuse forms. At most, viewers are motivated to see in the deep blue of *Late Summer 2* (2020), for example, an area of water or a summer's sky, although this does not exhaust the pictorial thrust of the work. Instead the artist exhibits an impressive sense of the canvas as a whole, of compositional affirmations, such as the empty space in the upper vertical middle. Or else the juxtaposition of clearly delineated colour planes and pictorial zones generated using a gestural style. Elements such as these imbue Zurier's painting with an animated depth, comparable to that of the famous abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko (1903-1970), who was constantly concerned less with the beauty of colour and more with a serious encounter between the corpus of the viewer and of the picture. In the 1940s and 50s, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman (1905-1970), both in New York, aimed to liberate themselves from European painting and evoke great emotions by means of a non-figurative colour-field painting. With his famous essay "The Sublime is Now!" (1948) Newman also raised the experience of the sublime that had been widespread in the European aesthetic of the 18th and 19th centuries to the status of the highest goal of his art. To this end, Newman used vertical bands of colour, so-called zips, that traverse his paintings and stand for the presence of the very moment of their genesis and reception. When Zurier integrates a comparable vertical line into *Untitled (Oct. 23, 2021)*, for example, he acknowledges his respect for this. However, he reduces the ideological charge involved to a formal sign on the picture's surface, a sign, what is more, that is painted in the same colour as its hazy background. Through his art Zurier would seem to be saying that colour sometimes takes this, sometimes that form.

The work *Late Summer 4 (Votilaekur, 2020)* is characterised by a monochrome turquoise. Again the painting stands out due to the deliberate absence of colour, both in the lower and in the upper horizontal zone. In narrative terms, what might be read here (as a water, sky or even meadow zone) is interrupted by an element with which the artist often plays: vertical colour markings at regular intervals on the pictorial surface, like metal brackets structuring it on the far right and left. As with the above-mentioned vertical zip, these formal elements lead straight to a break in the colour application, which otherwise appears to be rather atmospheric. In John Zurier's paintings it would seem that the great emotions suggested in the title *Late Summer* are both evoked and shattered in equal measure. Their iconic force is located in this realm between immersion and awareness, between emotional empathy and formalist intellect.

Robin Byland

Born in 1956 in Santa Monica, CA, he received a BA in landscape architecture in 1979 from the University of California, Berkeley and a MFA in Painting in 1984 from the University of California, Berkeley. Zurier currently lives and works in Berkeley, CA and in Iceland.

Selected museum exhibitions include: Moderna Museet Malmö, Sweden (2021); UC Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA (2018 and 2014); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2017); New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, NM (2016); Colby Museum of Art, Waterville, ME (2015). He has also exhibited at the 30th São Paulo Biennial, Brazil (2012); California Biennial, Orange County Museum of Art, CA (2010); 7th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2008); Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, England (2003); and the Whitney Biennial, NY (2002). In 2010 he was awarded the prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship.