

Galerie Francesca Pia

Emil Michael Klein

Opening Friday, November 24, 6–8pm
November 25, 2023 – February 10, 2024

Emil Klein's exhibition of new paintings marks a point of expansion regarding the artist's engagement with lineal space and composition, intermingling referents and styles of abstraction and delineation. The works seem responsive to the multi-axial uptake of environment informed by the extending interplay of human and device mapping and imaging, like watching a screen reclined looking up, or while hiking, driving, running or otherwise navigating a terrain.

The new works come in a variety of finishes, palettes and moods: Urban-to-suburban in grey-primed concrete foundations, flecked and streaked by gasoline-hued runoff; radiant and lunar in silver; earthy and solid in burnt umber, resembling welded metal or a hide. Plain lines are fused into geometric shapes, are worked over, rerouted and augmented, becoming bent and agglutinated in areas. There are instances of a performative *pentimento*, i.e. the exposure of the painter's working stages of accumulative alteration and overpaint. By further employing variegated painterly gestures, the works mimic though effectively outstrip Adobe Creative Cloud's virtually infinitely adjustable "brushes" (think feathered to blurred to drop-shadowed to dashed to so on and so forth).

The compositions' variously layered and accreting lines, cracks or fibers suggest coinciding processes of intergrowth, revision, retrofitting. This variability bespeaks a vacillation or ambiguity over what kind of painterly terrain or *umwelt* might be inferred to and explored (a mountain range, a lunar scape, an earth to mine, a land to subdivide, a body of water to divert etc.), in light of environments exposed to viral, pollutant, or algorithmic processes that are not always commensurately readable and predictable.

One *Untitled* canvas sticks out for its unusually stylized background or plane. Built up as ethereal fumes or plumes on the canvas's top left, Klein directs this atmospheric mass to the image's bottom right, breaking it down into gestural, unvarnished strokes. An ultramarine curve bisects the canvas and may either read as an elevation or a stream pictured from up high, snapped from a train window or abstracted from drone footage. Abstract painting's vaunted flatness is here not only casually upended but expanded, with the glacial and the fluvial, the frontal and the aerial becoming probabilities in equal parts.

There's traffic, flow and spread, processes signal to modern landscape painting if we think of JMW Turner's works like *Rain, Steam and Speed-The Great Western Railway* from 1844. Reflecting the changes to the English pastoral motif, Turner's landscapes are conspicuously furcated by lineal systems. From the early "canal mania" works in response to England's

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industrial makeover in the 18th century, they cumulate into an eclectic repertoire of environment marked by bridges, aqueducts, quays, piers, rail-, high- and waterways, all leading somewhere or nowhere, essentially overwhelming and undoing a singular vanishing point.

Neo-geo or Simulationist painter Peter Halley speaks of “conduits” and “models” in submitting the diagrammatic line to the didactic ends of his *Cell* and *Prison* paintings, transporting viewers to various closed circuits of postmodern surveillance and control. Klein’s linescapes, by contrast, are invariably indefinite and increasingly mutated, suggesting a more open-ended, ideologically flagrant “outside”, a network or system that can no longer be comprehensively grasped, much less imaged. When are we ever not simultaneously connected and distracted, tracking, following, searching. Is a network conceivable outside or beyond the *network*?

Forms do not necessarily follow function and Klein’s paintings on view at times recall graphs illustrating processes of value creation, developments, trends, outgrowth, or decline that frequently accompany contemporary studies of tech-capitalism. Think popular titles like *Automation and the Future of Work* or *Road to Nowhere: What Silicon Valley Gets Wrong About the Future of Transportation*. Such principally reductive system models are clustered and warped in Klein’s recently less reductive and less restrained paintings, to the point of becoming unexpectedly vegetal, ornamental, even escapist and improvisational—loose.

Daniel Horn