

Thomas Eggerer

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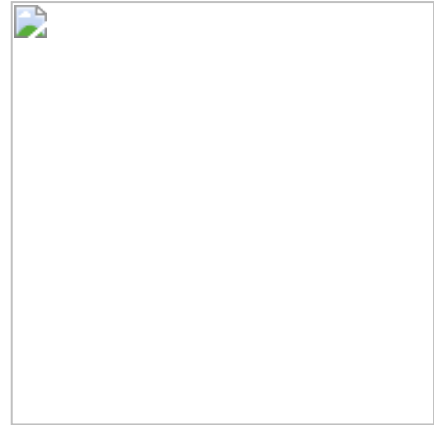


Thomas Eggerer: *Red Miasma*, 2015, oil on canvas, 51 by 44 inches; at Maureen Paley.

The figures that populate the recent paintings of the U.S.-based German artist Thomas Eggerer are engaged in activities that painting freezes and renders ambiguous or illegible. “Painting” and “figure” are here in conflict. Abstract registers—stains, softly scumbled areas, rhetorically gestural flourishes—clash with an explicitly depictive

figuration, based on found photographs but not photo-realistic. Within this dichotomy, each register is a sign for its idiom as well as an enactment of it.

Eggerer capitalizes on this clash of styles to express social alienation. The figures are young men in what we assume to be—judging from their lean, shirtless torsos and the cigarettes and beer cans they hold—a club, party or concert setting. Deriving from a small range of image fragments, they repeat in various sizes and degrees of definition across canvases ranging from roughly 4 to 6 feet in height. Over glowing monochrome grounds, the figures come in and out of focus, from the vaguest sketch to finely worked passages of chalky oil embellished with pedantic detail. Head or limbs are left as flashes of translucent color in conjunction with a finished torso that appears corpse-gray by contrast. Passages of virtuosic corporeal illusionism suggest quick, penetrating memories crystallized out of an eroded context.



As we cross-reference between canvases, images are exposed as repeated quotes, traced and retraced, that lose—through their obvious reproducibility—credibility as individuals specific to the pictorial world in which they find themselves. In *Lavender Ozone* (2015), Eggerer has emphasized the disconnect between his figures by dividing the composition into three almost equal zones, the upper one ironically breached by a hand holding a hyperreal cigarette.

Also exhibited was a series of untitled collages (all 2013) that juxtapose clippings of depersonalizing urban crowds with architectural and sculptural images. Isolated, like the figures in the paintings, against full-color monochrome grounds, the figurative image fragments are reduced to geometric abstract designs, elegant indices of the streamlining of individuality into functional social structures.

Eggerer's means have changed little over the past decade, allowing him to explore with ever greater technical precision how painting's lack of innate referentiality, its tendency to blur into abstraction and materiality, can serve as a metaphor for the atomization of the social fabric. The abstract passages between the figures isolate them, leaving them stranded in the flux of an anonymous, indeterminate world of flickering contacts.

Sometimes, however, the roles reverse, and the figures are cast as negative spaces, cameoed areas of glowing ground isolated by the darker overpainting surrounding them, and interchangeable with the space they occupy. The grounds are both self and not-self, the infernal glow of a nightclub and the warm illumination of subjectivity. A tangle of superimposed figure-sketching, traced into some of these cameos, signifies the unraveling of the centered self into a vertiginous relativism.

Eggerer's primary-colored washes, at once undermining and bolstering his figures, have been compared to the flat red or orange grounds of many of Francis Bacon's triptychs. But Bacon's figures are more profoundly disillusioned and debauched. Eggerer's new works most vividly recall the 1960s party pictures of British painter Michael Andrews (a friend of Bacon's), in which an aura of decadence masks a deeper vein of esoteric idealism and innocence. Like Andrews's partygoers, flaring briefly only to dissolve into their brilliant backgrounds, Eggerer's callow clubbers are tranced acolytes caught in the spotlight of the artist's desire.