

# Must-See: Thomas Eggerer's Exercise in Stillness

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*This review is part of a series of Must-See shows, in which a writer delivers a snapshot of a current exhibition*

Central to Thomas Eggerer's latest show at Captain Petzel, 'Galeria', is a monumental new painting depicting the interior of a large gym in which figures stretch, jog, box and lift weights. The characters in *Fitness* (2024) are dispersed across the flat, wide-angled scene in such a way as to give compositional punctuation; limbs, extended at diagonals, direct the eye around the picture plane. Two joggers near the base of the work exercise together; the rest attend to their regimes alone. The viewer observes from above, at a vantage point higher than the neon strip lights that hang from the ceiling. The stillness of the scene contrasts starkly with the muscular activities on display.



Thomas Eggerer, *Fitness*, 2024, oil on canvas, 2.9 × 4.1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin

Elsewhere, Eggerer employs bold colour and composition to heighten the formal thrust of a series of paintings depicting acts of protest. Despite this, works such as *Stranded* and *High and Dry* (both 2021) hint at the futility of these anonymous activists' demonstrations: their placards and flags remain blank while recognizable corporate logos – The North Face, Rolling Rock, McDonalds – are visible on the clothing they wear and the products they consume. The overall impression is one of political ennui.

A number of the artist's collages, including *Floorgames* (2018) and *Aerobic Ballet* (2022), are also on display. These works share the paintings' penchant for combining formal picture-making with figures in a variety of activities, both athletic and leisurely. Yet, while the presence of a photographic source in these compositions allows for a greater breadth of texture, it is in the flatness of the paintings that Eggerer's particular brand of ambiguity is most effective.



Thomas Eggerer, *Stranded*, 2021, oil, resin and beeswax on linen, 1.8 × 1.8 m. Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin

Uniting the works in 'Galeria' is a tension that occupies the gap between the calm pragmatism of the artist's painterly application and the active (or activist) bodies he portrays. There is something back-to-front, though: it is the juiced-up colour in the negative spaces – rather than the characters depicted within them – that gives these works their thrumming physicality. Eggerer paints vivid tableaux of exercise and protest, but his figures are wan and weary, unsure what they're training or marching for. At a time of discord, doubt is a powerful alternative.

*Thomas Eggerer's 'Galeria' is on view at Captain Petzel, Berlin, until 21 December*

*Main image: Thomas Eggerer, Tanning, 2022, wallpaper, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin*