

Painting as Dialogue

Dino Zrnec's brown paintings on view in the exhibition *Good Neighbours* are so smudgy, yet baroque, dirty and delicate in detail, I want to fall into them face forward. Their thick surface – dull at times, oily at others, with gleaming golden and silver accents – is exuberantly rich in paint and gesture, which turns looking into a visceral experience. Tracing the brushstrokes and delving into the numerous layers of substance is a matter of pleasure. There is no illusion in these works. No window to another world, but material and action.

Arranged in the form of a three-dimensional triptych, the two canvas bodies squeeze a glass picture between their loins. Constituting a sculptural approach to painting, the glass piece protrudes into the space at a right angle. The colourful composition can only be seen if you break away from the usual frontal perspective and move around. Its clear lines stand in stark contrast to the messy mark making of the muddy surfaces that shine through it. Traditionally, stained glass develops its effect through translucent light that creates high colour luminosity together with a mystical ceremonial mood. This makes it a perfect fit for religious architecture. Zrnec's glass painting in contrast radiates anything but sacredness. The object is pretty and decorative in a corny, almost campy way – cheerfully attractive and distasteful at the same time. Referencing painting's traditional notion of the sublime, these works let harmony and transcendence collapse against sheer objecthood.

For Zrnec, art is a place of process-based experimentation that engages with the conceptual framework of painting, its history and materials. The artist is an expert when it comes to the rules and preparatory rituals of the medium, and yet he likes to turn them on their head without reverence but with a humorous joy of pushing painting to its limits. The surfaces of some of his earlier works have cracks or creases, the reverse side shines through or the canvases are deliberately overstretched. The new brown paintings are made by applying medium, acrylic, oil and tempera in a non-conventional order. In fact, Zrnec started the painting with gluing Tyvek onto the canvas, a material used to wrap the work in order to protect it from dirt. If the painting were a body, it would just be stripped bare and turned inside out with the bones covering the skin.

Another work on display had been attacked by moths over the years. The artist simply fixed the holes with small canvas patches highlighting time, chance and decay as part of the work. For a further set of two paintings combined with a glass piece, Zrnec collaged real leaves onto the blank canvas and mixed these readymade fragments with wild strokes. As a large part of the surface remains unpainted, these works have the provisional quality of a sketch. That the artist bluntly shows the carrier of the painting matches his anti-illusionist and anti-idealist approach to the medium: Zrnec's works always reveal themselves in their made-ness – as a material object instead of a second self-contained reality.

Painting is generally regarded as a lonely endeavour with the artist immersed in the process all on their own. Dino Zrnec's approach, in contrast, is not necessarily a solitary one. It requires leaving the studio, engaging with new crafts and collaborating with different people. For example, when the artist commissions tufted carpets from paintings he made. Or this time, when he goes out to visit different glaziers with a sketch, which is then realized in different styles and types of glass depending on the specific craftsman. *Good Neighbours* is therefore all about dialogue – between techniques and aesthetics, materials and space embracing each other and colliding at the same time.

Text by Ramona Heinlein
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