

Tobias Pils “Adam & Eve“ at Eva Presenhuber, Maag Areal, Zurich

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Tobias Pils “Adam & Eve“ at Eva Presenhuber, Maag Areal, Zurich, 2020

© Tobias Pils. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich

EXHIBITIONS

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present a new solo exhibition with the Viennese artist Tobias Pils. After presentations in Zurich, New York, and Antiparos, this is the gallery’s fourth solo exhibition with the artist.

Pils’ paintings and graphic works are almost beyond interpretation. His painting process is characterized by planning, which then negates itself throughout its execution. As a result, representation flips into abstraction, figuration turns into composition. Pils’ work creates an unease of interpretation and challenges the notion of subjectivity in painting: His method follows intuition and is created in the context of the painter’s everyday. Yet, he never fulfills his plan and instead takes different directions while

painting. In doing so, he produces manifold forms within one canvas. Nevertheless, his practice is always accompanied by technical precision and pictorial thought. Pils creates work whose attraction lies in the ambivalence of interpretative uncanniness, discontinuity, and technical mastery.

In the exhibition “Adam & Eve”, Pils shows six new paintings of different formats and six ink-on-paper drawings, all of the same size (115 x 83 cm), which accompany the paintings. The works are centered on the motif of a couple under an apple tree. However, the title Adam & Eve was chosen after their completion and does not necessarily imply a framing within cultural history. It is rather a way of making this association tenuous; to make space for the uncertainties the artistic process comes with. By naming an obvious interpretation in the title, it becomes less significant.

Pils does not start his pictures with ideas; they evolve during their making — and dissolve at the same time. Through composition and formal realization, preconscious ideas become imagery. The idea of a loving couple embedded in nature is not drawn from the past, but rather from a subjective utopian future, which the painter drags into the present.

Uncertainty, ignorance, and the allusions to existing narratives — for example, that of Adam and Eve — evolve only when viewer and work face each other. Pils interweaves a subjective future made present in the pieces and the past of collective memory.

The imagery of the six paintings, which seems clear at first sight, evolves and dissolves into contradictions: Apples, trees, and couples are depicted in each painting, yet their relations with one another remain ambiguous. The couples, mostly painted in bubble-like shapes, seem to be simultaneously rooted in and isolated from nature. It remains unclear whether the bubbles are connected to the trees or exist separately from them. In one of the paintings, the trees in front of the entwined couple seem to set a stage. Subsequently, it is impossible to estimate the distance between them. In these paintings, one cannot determine the narrative.

The six ink-on-paper drawings each correspond to one of the paintings. They are not preliminary sketches, but drawn after the fact, revisiting the images and reflecting upon them. They can be understood as an exercise — or meditation — the result of which is unclear. The drawings are also not the outcome of a serial practice, but rather a return to the painting, which is not supposed to be repeated. Furthermore, the material — more than a hundred years old paper emanating its own atmosphere — cannot be reproduced, thereby contributing to the uniqueness of the drawings. Nothing the sketches show is predictable, they show the outcome of what occurred during meditation.

At Eva Presenhuber, Maag Areal, Zurich
until 14 March 2020