

Thomas Eggerer

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November 1, 2017



Thomas Eggerer, *Moonlight Slowdown*, 2017, oil on linen, 65 x 64".

Thomas Eggerer's recent exhibition marked a conspicuous shift in the artist's practice. While architecture and the (almost always male) human figure have long been central to Eggerer's paintings, both subjects typically appeared with a brushy unfinished that emphasized the paintings' process. In contrast, Eggerer's new compositions have a smooth, even-sealed quality to them. But perhaps the defining feature of the painter's earlier practice was that his bodies almost always appeared in groups—clamoring in the ocean, working in the fields, traveling by bus, or lolling about on a playground. Here, in the new paintings, when there are bodies at all, they are often seen alone and in pieces.

The first thing one noticed upon entering the exhibition was its emptiness. Three paintings all depicted some stretch of sidewalk, replete with grates and manhole covers. The viewer confronted these surfaces at odd angles, as if they had been turned up to meet us or we were crashing down on them. (No bodies were on offer, unless one figured the viewer into the composition.) While the storm drains suggested urban infrastructure, they also evoked psychological depths, especially one (*Spill*, 2017) with a large, shadowy, spreading stain. I was reminded of some of Robert Gober's work from the 1990s, especially his installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, where grates placed in the museum floor allowed viewers to glance down at water rushing below. Many of Eggerer's paintings in the next room, where bodies did turn up, called to mind tropes of contemporary sculpture that, while in debt to earlier paradigms, also conjured current "post-internet" work, given the way they figured together technology and the body. It was striking to see these motifs migrate over into the space of painting where their surfaces can be retouched and they bask in a strange gray-purple twilight, like the glow cast off a screen.

Many of the figures clutched objects, such as a pack of menthol Marlboro cigarettes, a can of Bitburger beer, lighters, cash, and plastic bags. (Other items were laid out as if for trade or barter.) But there was often something about a figure's grasp that seemed to point to some other type of object, or that indicated these objects were fulfilling some want or desire other than the one they were made for: The way one guy's thumb curled around a can of beer brought to mind nothing so much as the way I hold my iPhone. These painted images weren't identical to their offscreen (off-painting) referents, then; they bent their subjects in new ways. The same was true for Eggerer's shirtless guys. Though generally communicating a state of ennui, the paintings made connections between things and surfaces and parts of people, which, hovering somewhere between the metaphorical and the literal, did not forego attachment entirely.

Unlike many other New York painters, Eggerer is determined to see what he can do with "in the frame" painting; he doesn't rely on props or supports—not even the odd sculpture or augmented reality app—to buttress his point. In fact, the artist's determined relationship to painting has pushed out other parts of his practice; for many years, Eggerer showed his paintings among drawings and collages. Collage lingers on here all the same; the stark juxtaposition of images that one associates with the avant-garde technique endures, but what's new is the strange and compelling way in which objects are constellated together, hovering in a gray space, in our hands and out of reach at the same time. "Todd" is the mysterious title that Eggerer gave this show, as if there is someone somewhere who can see the bigger picture.

—Alex Kitnick