

»Correspondences« | Exhibition at Hattingen Municipal Museum, September 2021Thomas Koch – in dialog with Marie-France Goerens | Alex Klein | Karl Kriebel | Tonneke Sengers | Guido Zehetbauer-Salzer

Alex Klein

FRAGILE LAYERING

There is an almost sculptural quality in Alex Klein's approach to his pictorial work. Like a sculptor, he sands his pieces, removing layers that had been added previously. Layered washes. His material could hardly be more fragile or more subtle in its consistency: Pigments as the essence of color, ultra-fine particles, color that is ethereal in nature – on a ground such as glass, paper or cardboard.

He constantly rearranges color fields from a pastel, soft, muted and light color palette applied on cardboard, observing the way they change during the course of a day, the course of time. Superimposes new layers, removes them again. His works are often the culmination of a years-long process. Alex Klein lets them rest, find themselves. Lets the new surface mature, then makes contact with it once more, sets to work on it again, removing it to move nearer the core. In the search for absolute equilibrium, timelessness. Until the painting has ended its journey. Has found peace. And thus comes alive.

The layers are so subtle and so closely interwoven that it is not possible to discern which is the first one and which the last. Up to 60 layers, their materiality non-existent. What remains is a hint of color. Delicate. A reminder of the surface's vulnerability. Left there, these layers of color create a sense of space. Pull towards the depths with their so unfathomable surface structure. A deep dive into the painting, into this timeless space of colors.

He searches for depth and three-dimensionality through color on a plane. Applying, removing, consolidating and dissolving. Color and shape become one. He defines the boundaries of these shapes and determines direction with fine lines, some intimated, some more concrete. Space constructs, architectural context, the hints remain, leaving room for interpretation. Was that line drawn or is it the shadow that delineates the line? In the "Architekturserie", Alex Klein fits together his layers of cardboard like the pieces of a puzzle. Lines that do not separate space, but that create themselves by intertwining. Joints. The usual construction method in reverse: Here, space is not defined by the line, rather the line is defined by space. In his "Wandstücke", on the other hand, shadows makes the lines visible. Three-dimensionality from layered fields of cardboard that is immediately undone by overlapping, interconnecting color fields. Light is the element that defines depth.

Alex Klein works in both directions, into the room – towards the observer – and towards the wall, hidden and condensed behind glass. It is precisely this painting/layering on glass that reveals the diaphanous quality of his color layers. A process that might appear to be a contradiction in terms – if the first layer is the visible layer, how can the other layers be recognizable, behind the glass? In his work, though, there is no bottom and no top layer of color, they become one in their transparency. Colors transformed into light. Layered light.

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