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THOMAS KRATZ

'No tracks. No traces'

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No tracks. No traces. is the title of the second solo exhibition by Thomas Kratz at Croy Nielsen; right from the beginning, it formulates a negation of recognisable vestiges and imprints which, are in fact present in the pictures. His new monochrome pictures display a radical formal reduction, and the dense textures of their colouration both radiate outward beyond the pictorial borders and summon up an inner spatial depth. The works—executed in acrylic or ink on image-carriers such as wood, aluminum, canvas, or jute—oscillate between darkened and white surfaces which exhibit the artist's multiple working modes and take these processes themselves as a theme.

Kratz treats the medium of painting as "material" in itself—he works with and on it. This becomes clear through the object-like, wooden panel pictures whose surfaces he works on, not only with a brush, but also with heavy, rough tools such as a drill, a saw, or a chisel. To some extent, he intervenes in the wooden image-carriers with violative and brutal milled recesses and excisions; he emphasizes a conceptional constructibility which disrupts the classical gesture of painting. He applies multiple layers of paint to his pictures—monochrome white upon the canvasses, and in the case of the paintings on wood subdued, composite colours whose hue is derived from the intensive examination of incarnadine in the *Nude Paintings* (2010). The new pictures are increasingly composed out of an archaeology of accumulations and process-oriented interventions by the artist: They manifest stored movements in time which engender a finely balanced interrelationship between the transparency and opacity of the colors. The evolving intensities of colour become perceptible on the surface both simultaneously and individually; they appear and disappear like an insubstantial simulacrum. Inasmuch as Kratz, through the exhibition title, productively negates possible tracks and traces, he leads the viewer up quite close to the images and ushers his perception into an ambivalent visual experience alternating between proximity and distance.

In this process, the concentrations of various levels come to resemble tactile surfaces such as cloth or velvet. The pictures thereby point towards a modality of seeing as an experience of touching, or as the French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty described it: a recognition "that all visible aspects are cut out of the tangible, that each tactile existence is in a certain sense assigned to visibility, and that there is intrusion and encroachment, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible which is embedded within the tangible."¹ In their haptic quality, Kratz' pictures achieve an almost metaphysical and auratic impact which, upon closer scrutiny, is again

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Das Sichtbare und das Unsichtbare* ("The Visible and the Invisible"), edited by Claude Lefort, Munich 1986 (English version of the German by the present translator).

disrupted by the partially aggressive methods of production and the interventions which are open to view.

The brittle composure and sobriety of the works is reminiscent of the influence of Eastern art, which resonates through the technique of ink painting. In these works created by pouring extremely diluted ink and pigments onto a horizontally positioned, unprimed canvas, Kratz allows a motif to arise in a painterly process positioned somewhere between chance occurrence and deliberate control. Kratz completes his pictures in the moment when they are situated in an unstable state between the recognisable presence of vestiges and their simultaneous blurring and dissipation. Just as in the *Nude Paintings*, which bring layers of paint and human skin into relation with each other, so in his recent works does Kratz demonstrate that not only are they pure surfaces, but above all they are also structures of material layerings and the intermediate spaces originating therefrom. These works establish constantly changing transits of colours and spatial gaps, and they demand a moving gaze which cannot fall back on what has already been seen or become known. In place of an investigation into what is concealed within invisibility, a search for absent actions or traces, they instead entice the viewer to inquire into vision itself.

Simone Neuenschwander

Thomas Kratz (born 1972) lives and works in Berlin. He studied with Prof. Günther Förg at the Hochschule für Gestaltung / ZKM, in Karlsruhe and at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich. In 2005 he completed his studies with the master of Painting at the Royal College of Art in London. His works have been shown in solo and group exhibitions at Clonlea Studios, Dublin (2011), Brandenburgischer Kunstverein, Potsdam (2011), Croy Nielsen, Berlin (2010), Konsthall, Malmö (2010), Schmela Haus, Düsseldorf (2010), The Return, Dublin (2008), Kunstverein Frankfurt (2008) and at kunstraum, München (2007). In August 2012 Kratz opens his solo exhibition at Bielefelder Kunstverein.