



KANG CONTEMPORARY

## ***Seeing the Sun through Closed Eyes***

Dirk Eicken

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Painting has failed - that is a fact! It has failed as an image-producing medium, insofar as the production of images up to the threshold of modernity had the task of creating a true representation of reality. But the failure or even the death of painting has not made painting impossible. On the contrary: the death of painting actually brought it to life in the first place. Why? Because the impossibility of painting a true picture has made painting aware of the need to think about itself.

In *Seeing the Sun through Closed Eyes*, Dirk Eicken searches for the possibilities of painting under the condition of its failure. In doing so, he translates the historical break with referentiality and the image by breaking up the hierarchy of layers in a peculiar way: Derived from three series developed over the last decade, the pictorial surface becomes nonhierarchical, as it is reconceived as an error-prone, deliberate form of mediation that asserts itself as merely one among numerous layers of perception. The failure of referential representation thus turns the explicit question of correct seeing, as Picasso still had it in mind when he compared painting with the mirror and the camera, into the question of incorrect seeing or of a failed way of seeing: What do we miss when we see?

Impressionism already responded to the death of painting through photography and technical copying and reproduction techniques by turning its interest and attention away from the production of images and towards the specific sensuality of seeing, the process of perception. Eicken's works investigate a mode of perception that does not stop at the superficial appearance of the images. In place of rational recognition as the identification of the picture surface with a conceptual knowledge, Eicken takes a look through, a searching empathy with the interior of the picture, which, however, remains conscious of its speculative nature. The canvas appears as the surface of a deeply structured, complex entity with a history, a hidden life of its own, which must be sought within the framework of a sentient way of seeing in order to be experienced.

Eicken's long standing engagement with American abstract art, in particular with Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella and Donald Judd, has left clear conceptual and stylistic traces in his work. It is from this frame of reference that he ultimately develops his own independent style of representation: With his two-layered paintings, he disregards Stella's and Judd's dictum *what you see is what you see* and opens up a second view through the superficial image into the interior of the painting. Eicken lacks the naive positivism of surface realism and the associated naive trust in the material world and its perception.

For the destructive undermining of the creative perceptions of painting, Eicken follows the paradigm of overpainting or spanning the canvases in the series *an der Seite*, whereby the reproduction of media images, especially portraits of fugitives, are ultimately spanned and painted with abstract lines, completely covering the original support. This creates an invisible network of relationships of mutual negative determination: the subject, the mental image is already predetermined as a media image outside of consciousness, is found, is random or arbitrary, is ultimately reproduced in a certain way and finally superimposed.



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However, painting serves perceptual skepticism as a means of critically analyzing visibility; it achieves this above all by breaking up the evidence of the image through the visibility of the surface and the painterly activity, and conversely by undermining the reality of carrier and commission by means of the immanent visual reality of pictorial spatiality.

For Eicken, reality proves to be fundamentally problematic: all perception is already interpretation, the creation of an image of the thing, without the possibility of penetrating this image of the thing. The binding of all evidence to the externality of the senses turns perception into an appearance, into a screen on which the phenomenal, apparent effects of reality emerge as a mental image.

In his latest series of works, *das Versagen* (failure), which will be shown in the second part of the exhibition from 1 March, Eicken devotes himself to the interpretative gaze using the example of the sun. A metaphysical quantity whose essential significance for human life has been sung about in global cultural history since time immemorial. Perhaps precisely because the richest celestial body usually eludes our gaze - the lens of the camera in principle - it is considered a supernatural projection surface par excellence simply because of its radiance. Visible to all and yet invisible, the sun hovers above us as a symbol of hope, powerlessness, violence, life and beauty. In *das Versagen*, the sun appears as a powerful void that undermines the evidence of the image, the evidence of perception, the evidence of expression and the evidence of optical signs. In this way, the representations are thematized from their reality-producing side. In the same way that failure brings painting to new life, the negation of seeing in painting opens up a new perception and a reflection on the objects of our perception: How do we perceive the sun, if we see it through closed eyes?

Text by Lukas Treiber