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REVIEW: RALF DEREICH AT CRUISE&CALLAS

Drowsy Delight In Every Corner!



Gallerist Kirstin Strunz with some delightful paintings by Ralf Dereich. Photo: Chris Phillips

What is the link between abstract painting and emotion? How can we connect better to an art language void of world mimesis? Join us as we contrast the viewer's appreciation process with the artist's own perspective!

Cruise&Callas is a small and sexy looking gallery hidden in Kreuzberg—to enter one must first go through a classic Berliner inner courtyard. There are two rooms, one on the first floor and the other located in a basement. Three of the paintings from **"Freel,"** the current exhibition by **Ralf Dereich**, are shown on the ground floor and the remaining three are exhibited downstairs. In the basement there are quite a few ventilators, light tubes that emanate intense yet condensed brightness and walls with peeled off paint that go along perfectly with Dereich's paintings. It could have been an unsettling experience because of the droning ventilator sound and little light, but the pastel colors and the very soft strokes proved to emit a soothing and bland effect on me.

On First Impressions

Walter Benjamin referred in his most quoted essay—**The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction**—to the concept of "aura." One of his approaches to define the term is that it is the "atmosphere of detached and transcendent beauty" that surrounds a work of art; a work embedded in its context. I believe this is the case with this thoroughly curated exhibition where the artist did the hanging up of the works himself.

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Benjamin's aura better explained

Dereich's artistic language is shaped through various approaches: there are subtle and smoky strokes as well as splashes and drips of paint. Some strokes resemble calligraphy and others resemble an air-filled space. The colors that prevail are mostly pastel shades of violet, blue and pink. The artist stated that some of these strokes become conscious before they are made, while others do so afterwards.

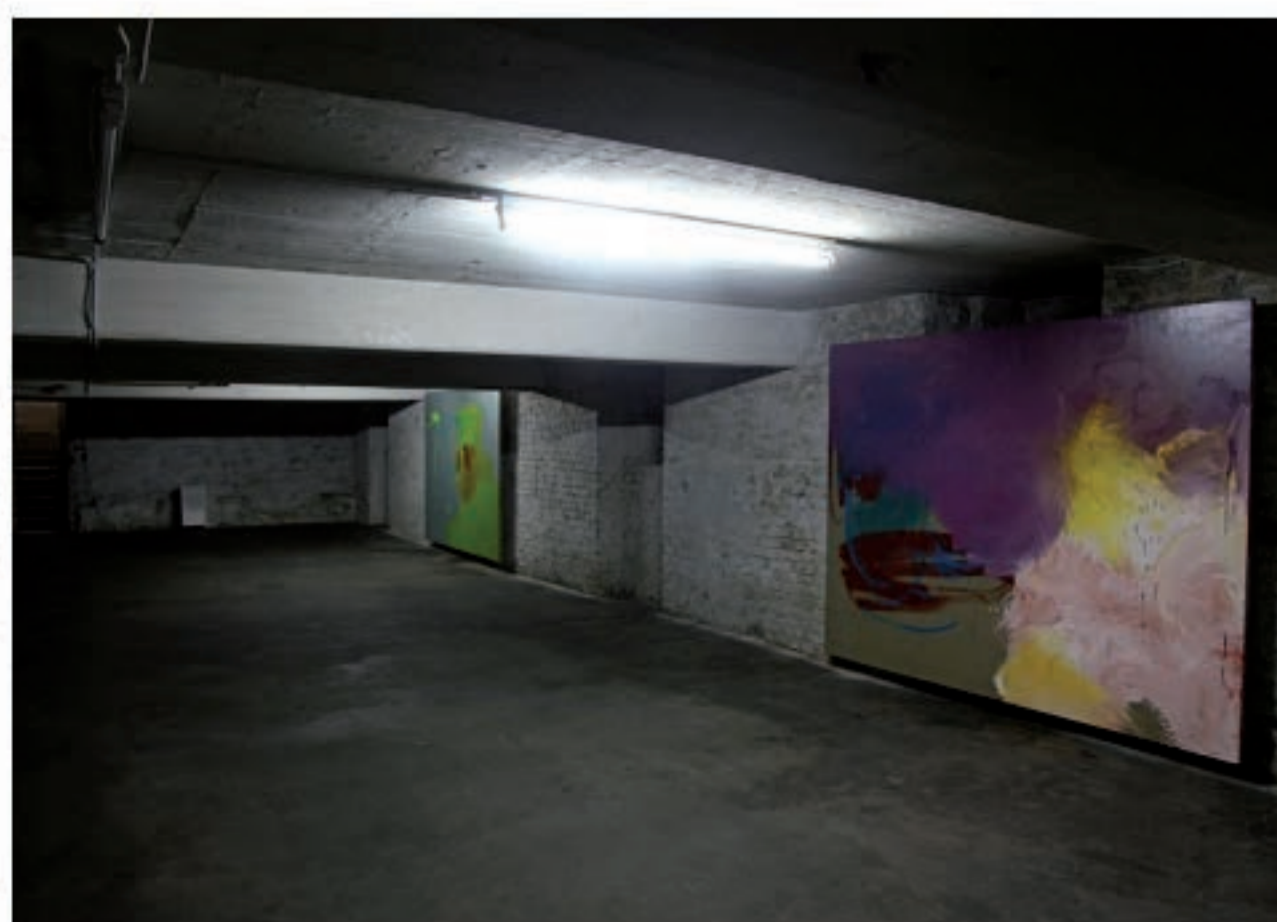


Photo courtesy of the gallery.

The first impression I received from the paintings was how comfortable they made me feel. As a viewer, I perceived a pleasant, vague and otherworldly feeling. Initially, they gave me the sense of being something pre-done or un-done. One of the paintings exhibited in the basement reminded me of a Toulouse-Lautrec drawing, **"Madame Lucy"**, that I am very fond of. My thought-process immediately linked it to this more figurative art piece. Simultaneously, these paintings could be worn-off, erased, or blotted out drawings; the remains of a creation or what lingers after more realistic representations.

On Second Thoughts

After coming in contact with the artist and referring some of my questions to him, he wrote: "If you talk about pre- or un-done, you talk about a certain belief of what is properly done. I can find everything in these paintings". That led my reflection once more to the title of the exhibition. Abstract painting can sometimes be more accurate than figurative painting when portraying different states of emotion. In order to make contact with those states, the reference is no longer the outside world, but our own inner world.



Inside Cruise&Callas: can you feel it? Photo: Chris Phillips

My process when understanding Dereich's work started with its alignment with a more mimetic representation of a 'defined' world phenomena. That sense of being a draft, a beginning or an ending of something else, distanced me to the idea of what it actually is. What is it, then? It is a feeling that exists along a continuum of different and defined strokes. It is a wholesome and powerful emotion that takes the form of an abstract representation.

Feel?

If you look up the word "feel" in a thesaurus, one of its synonyms is actually "aura." From the three definitions given in the Urban Online Dictionary, I chose: "A free feel. An awkward or inappropriate touch that bears no consequence due to its innocent (and oftentimes ignorant) nature."

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The viewer experiments a drowsy delight in a fantasy play-space when watching Dereich's work. Its aura is defined by the feelings it portrays and by the way in which they touch skillfully, mysteriously, the perception of the admirer. If you head on over to see the show, let me know if you can also feel it!

- **Cruise&Callas – "Freel" by Ralf Dereich** – April 26th to June 21st, 2013 – Wed-Sat 12pm to 6pm [Price of paintings: 9,200 Euros]

Article by Sofia Martinelli