

An Interview with James Krone

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Don't Panic

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In James Krone's "Waterhome", on view at Kavi Gupta Gallery until April 14, oil paintings hang from a system of support structures that blur the distinctions between front and back, the exposed and the concealed. Flecked with incidental marks and shimmering color gradations that shift between emerald green, deep purple and inky blue, Krone's paintings seem to register the residue of ambiguous deposits, offering subtle and sometimes quirky surprises that waver on the threshold between nothing and excess, the abstract and the concrete.

I love the idea of a "performance of exposure". Could you elaborate on that a bit?

I think the suggestion is that a definitive exposure of intention is an impossibility. The desire to make a gesture and simultaneously demystify this gesture becomes more about creating a ritual for that desire in itself. How can permission be given to see something without saying "see this thing"? I'm not interested in creating a didactic scenario so the gesture must comprehend itself as a kind of performance of the longing for an impossible clarity. It's a kind of choreography of intentions.

Can you describe the process you used to make the paintings in "Waterhome"?

Transparently, I paint a single wash of color every day on a stretched canvas sized with rabbit skin glue. The accretion of color negates the preceding layers until there is a stoppage of perceptible change, after approximately 20 to 30 layers. Then I stop painting them and either reverse the canvas or leave it as a kind of ostensible monochrome. It's pretty much a deskilled, procedural maintenance of accumulation. The blind side, though, through diffusion, begins to mimic abstract painting tropes that are typically referent to aesthetic decision making; compositional variation, etc... The composition is devoid of subjective toiling while still containing some of the pleasures that have come from that sort of painting. This variation is inevitable and I think there is possibility for pleasure in the material that doesn't need to be excluded. This side of the paintings also has a mimetic resemblance to the growth of the algae in the fish tank. It's a primordial production process that resembles abstraction. As this happens in the glass cube it also occurs as the paint finds random arrangements through structural weaknesses in the canvas. The canvas becomes a sieve or a screen allowing certain things to pass while not others, in spite of my actions.

The durational dimension seems to play a huge role in the logic of the work, which has been produced over a period of three years so far. How will you know when the project is finished?

Duration is important to me in a relativistic sense. I'm not really interested in resolution and there isn't a designated point in time that might signify arrival or an end point so the fact of three years is merely a fact. The fish tank as a subject generator and the things I've made in response to that refuse a straight timeline. Perhaps the filter will just stop working and that will be all. It isn't about an idea of purity or the authenticity of the object, so maybe if it broke and I felt like I still wanted to keep working on it I'd just buy another fish tank or another filter. The perpetual and mindless production is what is interesting to me, so reacting to a source with a kind of implied duration facilitates this. I'm attracted to procedural habits that refuse to distinguish themselves in a symbolically progressive narrative.

The trellis is a really interesting reference, because it not only brings up issues around the control of entropic growth, but also alludes to a plotting structure or diagram. What was your initial interest in using the trellis as a support?

It was initially a solution for the problem of displaying a two sided painting. The trellises I made for this show resemble stretcher bars, but I also am interested in their functions as decorative framing for obstructing a public gaze and as conductors that direct the growth of vines that would otherwise strangle their neighboring plants. I like that the support is made of torqued squares, diamonds, within a rectilinear frame, formally. There's a pseudo-romantic aspect to them in that they create an illusion of decay while preserving the structural value of architecture. I think of architecture as a kind of a culturally imposed system of physical law placed by civic authorities in order to escape natural law.

Where do you find your source materials- what kinds of things have you been looking at or thinking about while this project has been underway?

I'm interested in the vulnerability of meaning, how one can extrapolate meaning from something devoid of philosophical intention, and how porous or susceptible things are to this. I'm always looking at everything. I'm generally attracted to the things that are lying around me, in my studio or in the general distances I move within; flotsam from my studio, a passage from a book, something I see on ebay... I don't really differentiate context or constitution, whether it's material or cultural, when it comes to an initial attraction. It's a kind of a pantheistic logic so anything is prey. For this show I pretty much just looked at the elements that are in it. It's a very local exhibition in many ways.

I'm intrigued by your recurrent use of the monochrome, both in "Waterhome" and your earlier "Ceremonial Paintings". How do you see your relationship to this particular mode of abstraction?

Monochromatic painting refers to the basic desire to soil what would appear to be an otherwise neutral canvas. I think that painting often comes down to a kind of touch or pressure and I like to slide this thought laterally to the way things apply pressure to one another through proximity or suggestion. A painting can't do much more than to express its desire to be a painting, to color a seemingly neutral plane, but by doing so this exposes a latent set of complications. What had been perceived as neutral, compromises the gesture initially thought to be unobstructed. Somehow this limitation seems to have indefinite potential; latent meaning in drag as neutrality.

In the installation, the trellis structures are set up in a way that recalls stage wings or props; a dressing screen partially blocks the view through the gallery window; actors marks are strewn along the floor as if to direct viewers through preset points of focus. Is a certain theatrical quality important to you in terms of the staging of space?

It kind of reduces the credibility of the aesthetic. I hate art when its credibility is reliant upon opportunistically generalized references, sly or overt, so it's an ethos that announces the costuming. I think it denotes a kind of good faith.

Besides that, I like theatricality, to a certain degree. I, also, like that I dislike theatricality, to a certain degree. It's inevitable. It's a pleasure and somehow it's a concession. It adds a patina that gives people permission to distrust the authority an exhibit might be initially given, to see it as self implicating.

How do you see the role of language in your work, for example in your choice of titles?

The language I choose is always bound to the work. Sometimes the title might indicate the behavior that produced the work or an attitude that preceded the behavior. Sometimes the work indicates the title and, occasionally, the title is meant to undermine the work. I never want to use language to mystify things but sometimes the suggestion of simplicity, when something cannot be simple, ends up working as a lubricant for a false sense of communion. Titles locate the mental relationship

of an object in space and time and are as formally relevant to me as any other component of a work.

"Illegible Deposit" takes up some of the motifs you've explored visually, such as porousness and reiteration, and translates them into speech. What was it like making this piece- was it your first foray into working with sound?

Some of that text has a logic similar to my visual work. I guess I believe that a gesture announces the coming of another gesture and this accumulation of layers begins to frame a taxonomy and a palimpsest, simultaneously. This logic can be dubious but then even a suspicion becomes a gesture that creates an echo and so on. Most of the work I do, regardless of medium, has to do with comprehending a perpetual state of becoming.

Illegible Deposit is an awkward piece. I think it's about mediation and exhaustion. It was originally written as the text for a performance I did somewhat recently. I read the piece twice while a mime I had hired walked around the crowd, trying to perform a set of tasks I'd described that were impossible to perform within the space. Eventually the mime gave up and just stood there while I finished reading the piece. Recorded as a sound piece, the sculptural element of it seems to be more prevalent.

You moved from California to Berlin. Has the city lived up to its mythos?

Does Berlin really have a mythos? I've been here for a while now. Berlin and LA have very different qualities. It's kind of a pleasant, beatific city but I think it's funny that people perceive Berlin as being particularly hip. There's certainly an aspect of that here but it's rather slight, self conscious. I see a lot of novelty vehicles and drum circles... it's kind of like San Francisco but with ashtrays and dog shit. It's a good city to make work in.

What's coming up next for you?

A few projects. An extensive video project that has to do with ecstasy and color theory. This collection of photographs I've been accumulating that picture the moon before anyone had claimed to have landed on it. Continuing the work I've been making. A lot of things, really.