

**Thomas Eggerer**  
"Fence Romance"

5 February – 17 April 2010  
opening reception on Friday, 5 February, 7-9 pm

Thomas Eggerer's new paintings feature figures in ambivalent spaces that are both expansive and limiting. The architectural elements in these works such as a fence in "Fence Romance" or the modernist frame in "Friday's Child" offer shelter and definition, and are nonetheless confining. A feeling of exposure and uncertainty is enhanced by the placement of the figures on slanted angles ("Downward") and even further by the orchestration of glances: The viewers' glances but also a regime of glances within the paintings themselves. The ambivalence of Eggerer's spatial constructions provides a context for a time frame – holding and releasing, breathing in and out, before and after.

One painting shows an unreasonably big yacht with crew members and hanger-outs on board holding in full summer action against the ocean waves, which are, compared to the graphically represented people, not at all defined, making the yacht somehow an image of a vessel, or a container of a group more absorbed with what happens inside of themselves, than with the space itself, the immense and deep world of the ocean. In another painting the background for some standing-around student-like looking people is slightly more defined, resembling some public space, something between a subway station or the public zoo's big glass window. The figures seem to care very much about what is happening in the phenomenon around them – most of their gestures even point to the friendly modernist environment. A third picture has two men very near to each other, a third one far off in the distance. In comparison the background space is much bigger here, more dominant, seemingly telling the bigger part of the story and one might immediately feel that this background even points to another completely different time, to something lying in the future, looking a bit like a science-fiction illustration of a weird tunnel with no end. Since the light and texture of the space are neither as flat or abstract as in the yacht painting nor are as distinctly referential to the contemporary environment as the second image, the painting almost demands another look. It becomes quite puzzling. Suddenly there is not just one background. The light in the tunnel is from another direction than in the very abstracted space behind, behind what divides the picture elliptically, a huge bended fence. The figures are kind of leaning against the scary fence, almost like saying, here we are standing with our backs to a dark past, looking into an even scarier-looking space of an empty seeming highly organized future. But still, for that moment surprisingly, they don't appear to be frightened.

Each of the works in this exhibition demands from the viewer somehow to return to the ones seen before in order to transport the findings between them, since they give great hints of how to better read their at first well-disguised narratives. They look at first like mostly well-constructed paintings, alone for their distinction between on one side the abstractly painted color fields and on the other the play with ambivalent meanings of gestures of the different human figures. But independent of that, it is possible that for viewers, who might have had experience with it, the space of the third painting sometimes turns from a sci-fi-like time warp into an almost religiously uncanny space of a, for instance, biblical story from long, long ago. But maybe not. Anyway, going through the exhibition the way of mutual image reading, the third, the biggest painting, becomes definitely more transparent after the study of another picture, the forth, that is painted on paper. Almost the same, or maybe even the same couple of young men as in the uncanny warp space walks down this time a declining ramp-like path, and behind we find a very textured space of dark floating colors. Maybe not one hundred percent correctly, but this work, the two downward moving figures in the space of a darkish universe, might include probably references to William Blake.

This work on paper almost seems to create sounds of deep minor largo playing strings like in a Godard movie. This imagined "sound" of the painting is comparable to Godard's handling of classical music, both in the ambivalent gesture of cultural quotation, but as well in the quality of suspending the contemporary "worldly" narrative with some timeless seriousness of existential effect.

In "Fence Romance" time seems almost like rotating from some prehistoric glimmer to the first mundane situation within historic time. The painting within the modern public space is full of the ringing and jingling of the sweet early experience of public space and of education in youth, and the painting of the yacht seems to be an international image, but there are some particular sounds in it which make it so close to what might be called the American experience. Apotheosis of "la situation Americain". The American-ness translates exactly half by means of content, by the poses of the represented group of people, etc., and half through the mode of painting itself. The division of the painting between pure painting pleasure and evocation of narratives becomes in the yacht painting almost humorously over-exemplified. Eggerer seems to follow his path with scientific consequence. One might not recognize it at first view, since the yacht appears so much to be simply in the

middle of the frame, but the upper half of the whole image is just color field painting only, while exactly the lower half is containing the arch-mundane luxury container of some leisure society only, but even here, so obviously, it is imagined with quite some background sounds, like the (in contemporary astronomy) so called dark flow.

Josef Strau