

Beginning on February 14th, Galerie Neu will show new paintings and collages by Berlin-based artist Birgit Megerle. In the main room of the gallery, Megerle's paintings of a carpet, decorative metal grating and geometric wall paneling evoke a strange interior space. In the triptych panel painting, Megerle layers a geometric Op-art design on top of loosely applied, gestural strokes and skeins of paint. In the paintings of the metal screen and carpet, she similarly combines formal elements of geometric abstraction with references to design history (the carpet is based on a pattern designed by Bauhaus artist/designer Gunta Stölzl). These works furnish the setting for an elusive crime mystery, accompanied by an original piano soundtrack. Megerle's narrative is, however, implied and her paintings deal with ideas of atmosphere and staging rather than with one specific story. In another triptych, two women painted in Grisaille tones frame a stylized metal screen. A further figure, a young man, kneels in another painting, seemingly absorbed in the examination of a chandelier. Both of the women are framed by monochrome, gray backgrounds; their bodies correspond to one another in terms of scale and posture and both figures direct their gaze toward the viewer. Although their eyes are shadowed, they appear to contemplate not only the viewer but also the resolution of Megerle's implied mystery, or problem. Through their near to life-size scale and palette, these ambivalent figures fluctuate between stillness (the gray implying statue) and confrontation. Their clothes locate them in the past: one wears a knee-length skirt, the other an androgynous vest and knickerbockers. The latter holds a pipe, a traditionally masculine accoutrement and also the classic attribute of a detective. The two women thus appear to form a detective duo, combining a dandy-like elegance with a play on traditional gender roles and depictions.

In the final painting of the ensemble, Megerle paints a deliberately collage-style representation of a stage. On the stage is a man dressed in a costume reminiscent of Russian avant-garde costume design. In the audience (echoing the viewer) and seen from behind, a woman stands looking on. Here, Megerle again interweaves gestural, formal marks with the illustrative figures. The elements that populate the rest of her installation (staging devices, pattern, characters) appear united in this work, teasing out a thread between flatness, illusion, painting and mystery.

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