

This duo exhibition functions as an intense dialogue between the works of two artists who are generational contemporaries: Sophie von Hellermann (1975 Munich, lives and works in London) and Josh Smith (1978 Tennessee, lives and works in New York). At the same time, the exhibition takes on a retrospective character, as it presents an overview of both artists' painterly activities of the last five years. Both approach painting as a permanently creative process: every work presents itself as a physical fragment that characterises their painterly thinking, rather than consistently aspiring to be recognised as a 'masterpiece'. In this way, their work creates, each in its own way, a mental opening toward new pictorial possibilities. Despite the similarity in the way they create great freedom and energy through their working process, the painterly result is radically different for both artists. This exhibition project develops into a subjective investigation of the fundamental approaches to painting.

Sophie von Hellermann makes both large and smaller compositions through which she develops a fairy tale-like and imaginative visual imagery. Every composition becomes a dynamic spectacle of motifs, lines, and colours, in which the boundaries between reality and fantasy, between the personal narrative and the collective past, and between abstraction and figuration are fully dissolved. She uses art history and painting's acquired freedoms in a painterly game that carries us as spectators into an unfamiliar world. The choice of subject matter, but also the very agile brushstrokes, the flowing lineage, and the use of a peculiar colour palette make Sophie von Hellermann's paintings particularly pleasing and dreamy looking. Every work testifies of her exceptional emotional sensitivity and is simultaneously a crystallisation point in her ongoing practise as a painter.

Josh Smith belongs to a painting tradition that seemed extinct, but which he manages to transform into a free repertory of forms. The work, with its explicit references to the history of painting, its 'expressive' style, its use of the signature and the absence of subject matter, could perhaps be considered non-contemporary. Josh Smith, however, refuses to employ contemporary art's typical strategies to assert its contemporaneity. Much like the artists he refers to – E.L. Kirchner, Pablo Picasso, Keith Haring, or Christopher Wool – Josh Smith uses painting not to illustrate something, but radically chooses to think through painting, evidenced in a considerable production. The fact that every subsequent painting is an elaboration on, and continuation of, the one before it, creates the notion of works generated in series. In this way, to the work of Josh Smith resists the quality criteria and style characteristics with which painting is normally evaluated.

This exhibition was realised in collaboration with Le Consortium Dijon (FR). An 'artist book' in which both artists pursue their collaboration further is published to accompany this exhibition.

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