

Adrian Schiess' largest single works so far, measuring 340 x 240 cm, were painted in the summer of 2009 and exhibited for the first time in the Musée d'Art Moderne in St. Etienne in the following year. What their form is concerned—fabric soaked in color and fit on rectangular stretcher frames attached to the wall—they are also his most conventional works. He has created many different things over the decades, but flat works that can be hung “like paintings” were not amongst them. Some of these new paintings look as if the floor of the artist's studio has been mopped with them. In other words, any attempt of the artist to transcend the reality of things—so simple and yet so difficult to achieve—has been purged from them. With these pictures Schiess has painted something that is as raw, unpretentious, actual, diverse, and irregular as nature itself, provided we do not look at nature for what we can do with it, but for what it simply is. He paints pictures that look like the floor of his studio but not like painted pictures. This is the most modest thing of all and yet infinitely difficult to give form to. And yet it needs a form, because the simplest thing can never be achieved “just like that.” The artist must work with elaboration and methodic inventiveness in order to free himself from every engrained intention with which habit tries to overcome a feeling of dissatisfaction with reality.

Schiess proceeds like a gardener when he paints. He layers several picture-sized pieces of fine, porous polyester fabric on top of each other and pours thin acrylic paint over them. This collects in the mesh of the fabric but also seeps through to the deeper layers. He then pulls out the lower sheets from underneath, tears them apart from each other and lays them on top again, repeating the procedure until he finally reaches an outcome that satisfies him and can be accepted as a finished painting. In this manner, he performs a series of painterly gestures whose immediacy he breaks and recreates in order to achieve something painterly that rests inside its own uniqueness and at the same time befits him. He does this under the impression of the things around him; in winter it is the blooming mimosa bushes that surround his studio. A picture is successful when the painter accomplishes both nature and a representation of nature.

Within Adrian Schiess's oeuvre, these paintings are new variations of what his older works—the reflecting color boards, the photographs enlarged beyond recognition, the canvases lavished with color material—have always been about: the emergence of the real. Within contemporary art, they show a commitment to abstraction, which, according to Adrian Schiess, is the only way to show that which is not subject to any determination extrinsic to itself.

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