

*If Kiaer's work consisted of formal arrangements of elements, its beauty would be too easily won, as if the studio or gallery were to become the surface for a poignant collage. Rather, the way it is disposed summons questions concerning why the pieces or fragments matter – how the insignificant, the marginal, the used-up, the abject and the tiny are no less important than the monumental, and perhaps infinitely more so.*

Michael Newman, Ian Kiaer, Aspen Art Museum catalogue, 2012

In his fourth solo presentation at Alison Jacques Gallery, Ian Kiaer revisits a premise he has explored through a number of years and museum shows: Alexandre Dumas' *The Black Tulip*. Like the 19th Century novelist, Kiaer is attracted by the idea of continually returning to what could ultimately be a redundant endeavour. For Dumas' Dutch protagonist this was to attempt to breed an unnaturally-hued, perfectly black flower. For Kiaer, it is to question what painting might be.

Throughout his recent practice – most notably in solo shows at Aspen Art Museum and the Kunstverein Munich – Kiaer has turned his attention to notions of refinement and redundancy in minor forms of painting. In so doing, he has made paintings without necessarily painting, instead selecting and arranging materials, models and found objects where motifs promise to inform while prompting thought of absent texts and gaps in knowledge.

The visitor to this exhibition first encounters a large, intensely yellow double-sided projection, of a fly passing across what is later recognisable as the surface of a painting, evincing Kiaer's interest in the pursuit of a colour that speaks beyond chromatic value to what might be a particular association or tone. Beyond this, smaller canvasses, film projections, hand-made miniature architectural models and apparently prosaic objects have been arranged with meticulous attention to their relationships with each other, the floor and walls. While made up of individual works, the entire exhibition has become a kind of still-life – a fragmented, intricate embodiment of Kiaer's interest with this minor form of painting. If one of his attractions to this genre is that it's traditionally unburdened by didactic narrative, Kiaer knows that the strength of the greatest still-lives lies in an attention to proximity, syntax and association.

Being sensitive to making nuanced alterations and refinements stems from Kiaer's attitude to the studio. He doesn't see the studio as a privileged place for high-artistic creation, nor believe in abandoning it altogether. Kiaer treats it as somewhere for gradual disclosure, where he and the objects are set aside from their daily functions for quiet poiesis – in his own words “allowing things to happen” instead of forcing them. Rather than deny the anxieties of the studio, Kiaer finds periods of inactivity – doing nothing, lying, sitting, waiting – an important alternative to the demand for

production. In this exhibition, the painting on which the fly walks previously served as the covering for his work table. As someone who is preoccupied by past and current failures, Kiaer has always found value in discarded objects and ideas, exploring what remains possible within them, even an artist's sense of impotence.

Ian Kiaer (b. London, 1971) lives and works in London. His work is currently exhibited at Tate Modern and Tate Britain, London and is on view at the 2012 Rennes Biennial. Recent museum solo shows include Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2012); Kunstverein Munich (2010); and GAM (Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea), Turin (2009); Group shows include *All of this and Nothing*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2011), *British Art Show 7*, Hayward Gallery London (2010-11), The 10th Lyon Biennale (2009); the 4th Berlin Biennial (2006); and the 50th Venice Biennale (2005). Forthcoming museum shows include Centre International d'Art & du Paysage, île de Vassivière. His work is in the collections of Tate, London; Museum fur Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Pinakothek, Munich; and Galleria Civica di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAM), Turin.

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