

René Kemp

*Tip Jar Mud Flap*

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9 January - 21 February 2025

A series of paintings shows simple views of walls seen up close, repeated scenes of the painter's observation of the flattenings of natural light on different surfaces: bricks, stones, or slate sets. Fixated on a single motif and diffused through repetition, they seem to display cornered paintings, firstly because they literally show angles, but also because of a specific positionality in which we imagine the painter to be in, in front of the humbling poverty of the elected subject. The chosen portions of the walls show most often the garnished architectural ornaments at their base, the ones that confront any passerby in daily wanderings. Sometimes rounded, they can look like plump bas-reliefs, sitting down the building on the street with refinement. The brushed light gives them a delicacy, and the sensuality of their shape, together with the candor of the subject, provides the feeling of a *faux decor* for a theatrical set design. This *mise-en-scène* makes them almost tasteful, almost as if those stratifications were the ones of a pastry, as in those "Cake or Fake?" videos, where all sorts of perceived objects open up as layer cakes. René Kemp's textured visibility gives flesh to a modest ordinary, painted images that are comforting yet strangely unsettling. The paintings are done quickly, without aftereffects, maybe since their earnestness lies precisely in their beginnings, and anything added on top would be insincere. Similar to the potent feeling of vanity procured by a successful still life painting, the realism of *Tip Jar Mud Flap* heightens up the senses of what lies already there, reaching disturbance of the tricking real from the start.

Alongside the wall pieces, the other series that compose the exhibition appear with a stronger sense of composure: bare canvases, unprepared and unpainted, void but for a sewn-in pocket. Contra the impressionistic tones of the wall pieces, those paintings-as-objects prefer to hang in their exteriority. In this reading, their dryness is expressionism, an inversion in line with their presentation as paintings, just as if they got turned inside out to meet the real world. Rigidified, more austere and formalist, the paintings seem at first glance to treat repression inside a determined history of the medium, maybe to leave a humorous back door open: their tailor-made "pocket" give the paintings the look of well-ironed shirts, formal attire for a good day at the office.

While both series assert their position differently, they join in treating the act of revelation as a presence to oneself: in both, we arrived even before starting the journey. Opening up in their muted feelings, the apparent simplicity of the paintings stages all kinds of deceptive games based on a reality that never seems so fake than when it is presented in the stability akin of a digital rendering. *Tip Jar Mud Flap* betrays a sense of evident presence to heighten a taste and consistency, producing discrete epiphanies, imitated second takes to make them look like first ones.

*Text by Paolo Baggi*