

Silke Otto-Knapp, who holds a professorship in Los Angeles since 2014, practices an almost old-fashioned form of grisaille painting of melancholy effect that grippingly contrasts with its modernist contents. Motifically, the pictures revolve around such figures as the author Gertrude Stein, the dance pioneer Yvonne Rainer, or the painter Edvard Munch.

Executed on canvas contrary to the traditional approach, her watercolors unfold an unusual genesis: rather than becoming manifest, Silke Otto-Knapp's objects and protagonists fade under monochrome black or silvery-gray watercolor or acrylic layers which the artist washes again and again. Her motifs seem to be caught in limbo between "appearing" and "disappearing." Otto-Knapp intertwines opposing paradigms of canvas painting like transparency and opacity or the emphasis on two-dimensional geometric features with a semantic in-depth dimension. This makes her belong to a generation of artists for which the dedication to the discursively charged field of painting is as important as questioning formal conventions.

The works shown in the present exhibition directly relate to the calm atmosphere of melancholy pervading the landscapes of Edvard Munch, whose original symbolism constitutes an important reference for Silke Otto-Knapp. The motif of the moon features in her works in a variety of ways. It dances into the picture and out from the landscape on a costume. Going through different stages of execution, the artist's motifs open up passages within and outside the pictorial space. The presentation in the exhibition space is also part of a general design notion. Depending on the venue of the show, the pictures become part of a conceptual performative context – whether through a historically important reference figure, architectural considerations, or performers in costumes acting with and around the pictures.

Cosima Rainer

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