

Although Thomas Eggerer's massive painting *Heavy Harvest* draws upon the multiple figure compositions of Pieter Breughel or Hieronymus Bosch, updating these populated landscapes with iconography borrowed from socialist propaganda, the figures in *Heavy Harvest* evoke above all the formalized language of ancient hieroglyphs. Repeating the same limited number of gestures, their stark choreography evokes a language: here the massive landscape, structured by the receding orthogonal furrows in the earth, is invaded by graphemic elements that transform the painting from an image of depth into a flat frieze, a text. Two competing axes of vision emerge, the vertical axis of depth perception and the horizontal axis of reading.

The linguistic quality dominates, above all, at the top of the painting, close to the horizon, where the spectator can scan the scene quickly from left to right. But the linguistic character of the figures disintegrates as the eye drifts downward, where the repetitive lateral choreography gives way to clusters of figures arranged into distinct visual foci. The eye of the spectator is captured at these magnetic centers, and the figures that first appeared, at the top of the canvas, as uniformly distributed bits of information begin to aggregate into more erratic groupings. Contrasting these optical centers, in turn, are three tractors, whose windshields perforate the landscape like three glaring computer screens that, almost too bright for the crepuscular scene, repulse the eye of the viewer.

In this way, *Heavy Harvest* explores the physiological rhythms of two contrasting modalities of visual perception, that of scanning-reading and that of looking-viewing. The emergence of the latter, markedly slower visual rhythm within the painting is underscored by Eggerer's use of multiple light sources to illuminate the scene: on the one hand, the naturalistic light that comes from above functions like a spotlight establishing patches of warmth and cold; at the same time, the yellow underpainting sets up a second, competing source of illumination within the canvas itself, a light that coruscates around individual figures. —Devin Fore

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*