

Eiko G.: Closer Look

88 Walker St ▪ Apr 5 - May 7, 2025



There's a moment when you first see *See bei Tag oder Die andere Seite* (Loosely, "The Other Side of the Lake"), the largest work in *Closer Look*, our second solo exhibition with Austrian painter Eiko G. In this moment, the work's subject cannot be determined; the eye is lost in a large expanse of cerulean blue, seeking, parsing, straining to make familiar forms out of smears and splotches. Those forms include ripples in the water's surface that might be limbs, creatures, or nothing at all, an outcropping of buildings, outlined but not filled-in, perched delicately at the lake's edge, rolling hills that seem

to be composed of celluloid, combusting in a film projector, and a hovering periwinkle cloud, more phantom than ordinary cumulus. In this pre-recognition moment, we understand we are facing something familiar, something that represents a concrete place, yet, we are full of doubt. This is the moment Eiko seeks to expand, to turn from a split-second flash into an ocean of experience. Alone in his studio, he moves large pieces of canvas from floor to wall, turning a dropcloths into grounds, and, occasionally, back to dropcloths. His is a process of finding the splotch that delineates the shadow, the stain that perfectly resembles a raincloud, rending these elements from the detritus, and placing them in close proximity with our own eye, moving across the lake's edge, trying in vain to find the line dividing the surface of the water from the sky. His is a daily practice of looking.

The water at issue here is in fact the Millstätter See, a large lake in southern Austria where the artist recently completed a residency (and a good deal of fishing), although it might be anywhere. The German word *Lichtspiel* ("play of light") comes to mind. European cities are often discussed for the character of their light, as if it is somehow older, more layered, more indebted to the various traditions of imagemaking found there, than their American counterparts. Here, light is a material, with weight and texture. In the voluminous *Flugversuch*, for example, light appears to give mass to a large billowing form. Its surface, glossy with craquelure, seems to follow a twisting pattern of air, even as a black-on-black figure, tethered by wisps of string, face trained upwards at its capacious mass, strains to contain it. There is a mystery to its means, to the process of its gestation (what was built up? what rubbed away? what found and what created willfully?) that is indicative of an essential truth about the work, a stance or ethic to this way of making pictures. The forlorn *Der Ausfall* takes this approach further; its mound of earth, sky, and trees (one felled, almost unremarkably so) are all delineated from the same span of cobalt by way of density and texture. Earth is raked, sky washed, trees scumbled. There is nothing outside or apart from its basic components; even its horizon bends like the edge of a hemisphere.

Where prior exhibitions found a painter at home in compact formats, here we see the power of pulling away from these small windows into bold expanses of color and volume, and back again. Certainly, Eiko's diminutive panels offer an array of fascinations: *Übersetzung*'s lone rower, headed noiselessly toward a waterfall made of a single wide knife pull; *Insomnia*'s lush urban sunset, dotted with smoke born of smudges and imperfections, doing just what is needed to tell us what we're seeing; *Das Gatter in der Kurve*'s easy lyricism; *Das Schiff*'s delicate boat, telling us the way the wind is blowing, the scale of its various elements; *The invisible watcher*'s tiny painting-within-a-painting. A simple experiment with these works is to mentally redact a single element. In each case, the entire picture is undone, dissolving into incidental marks, or else becoming something else entirely. This tells us the depth of the struggle to create them, the perfect equanimity of their components. The greatest pleasures, and greatest discoveries, however, lie in the exhibition's mid and large scale works. *Sucher* is a painting of exquisite subtlety. Here a lone figure ambles towards an outcropping of trees, their cadmium tufts indistinct not in the manner of weather, but in the shifting and incomplete way of a memory, stuck in the moment of articulation, somewhere between incalculable feeling and wooden language. The sun blares through cloud cover like a trumpet in a sandstorm, bright, fierce, distant. These are paintings for those of us who have camped under a blanket of stars, run out of water in deep wilderness, dug food from the soil with bare hands, pushed to the point of collapse and made it back to do it again.