

In his exhibition at the Secession, Dike Blair presents around fifty paintings. Most date from the years between 2010 and 2015, and with few exceptions, they depict the motifs listed in the prosaic title of his show. Three sculptures the American artist designed for the exhibition are arrangements of the titular four elements—floor, door, window, wall—but were also a response to the fact that his exhibition occupies four rooms. (In a fourth small room with no sculpture he shows small paintings of drinks and ashtrays, the subjects of his artist's book.) He conceived of the sculptures after an earlier visit to the Secession, hoping to generate an interesting circulation pattern to view the paintings. He also likes the paradox of illusionistic representation vs. concrete abstraction. Unlike Blair's pictures, which always operate within the representational register, his sculptures transform concrete objects such as a (freestanding) wall, a windowpane, a door leaf, and flooring materials into abstract compositions. The paintings, which show one of the four elements in isolation, are grouped by motifs, while the sculptures unite all four in a larger whole.

Dike Blair finds the subjects for his pictures by taking a careful look at fixtures of the world around him, focusing on details that are often hardly arresting. His repertoire of motifs is not limited to architectural elements, but he has deliberately kept it limited, employing repetition as a conceptual strategy. In addition to the architectural depictions that form the core of the exhibition, recurrent motifs in his oeuvre include still lifes—often of cocktails and arrangements that suggest the interior of a bar—as well as landscapes, flowers and women's eyes.

Dike Blair first explored the possibilities of gouache painting more than thirty years ago. As he honed his skills in this technique—gouaches, like watercolor paintings, a closely related genre, are always executed on paper—he gradually shifted his practice from working en plein air to painting from memory and eventually devised a characteristic studio practice in which he creates his paintings based on his snap shots. He sometimes manipulates his photographs and selects the most striking details—a good picture does not necessarily make for an interesting painting—usually working in a small format that derives from the size of commercially available watercolor paper. Blair paints in an almost photorealistic style, executing his pictures with subtlety and precision. The works on display attest to his interest in light and its reflection and his fascination with translucent materials such as glass and water. Delicate transitions and nuances between bright and dark, the mutations of colors between areas of light and shadow, and the almost imperceptible gradients they engender are the true focus of his paintings as well as his sculptures. Created for Blair's exhibition at the Secession, the wall elements on which his sculptures are based are painted in hazes of color, revealing subtle gradations only to the attentive eye.

For the past several years, Dike Blair has often presented his pictures in thematic pairs and in

interaction with sculptures, arrangements that bring out formal aspects and contrasting principles of order. The alternation of opulence and emptiness, nature and architecture, interior and exterior, center and periphery reflects the dualism that underlies the artist's thinking and creative approach and lets him confront a dilemma of artistic production: to make any formal choice is to discard a viable alternative that would yield a completely different result. Hence the frequent appearance in his oeuvre of pairs of paintings and sculptures that represent two versions.

Blair's early sculptures were conceived as landscapes, interiors, or three-dimensional paintings: he arranged objects and materials such as light fixtures, carpets, and modular elements in order to engender a specific ambiance or mood and prod the viewer to reflect on the process of formal decision-making. More recent works are sized to match the dimensions of the human body and incorporate painting into sculpture, fusing two registers that had coexisted as separate genres in his earlier oeuvre. Endowing his sculptural pieces with painterly traits and collapsing the distinction between art object and pictorial medium, Blair raises questions concerning the fundamental properties of the image and the surface beneath it.

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