

In Ulrich Wulff's new paintings there is a guy. He could be seen in Wulff's exhibition "*Wo soll das noch hinführen*" (*Where will this lead*) at Exile in Berlin in the early summer of 2016, and here he is again in "To be continued." He's been around for a long time, since the beginning of the early 2000s, even if he temporarily disappeared during the years that Wulff concentrated on abstract painting. You can see this guy (reminiscent of a clown) twice in the exhibition's central work, a triptych – incidentally the first triptych Wulff has ever painted. On the left canvas, he can be seen from behind as a half profile, his mouth gaping, his eyes open wide, a kind of helmet on his head. He looks into the image, the perspective tapering off to the right: a flight in three steps, a way purely into the painting and perhaps back out into infinity again. He looks in and what does he see? Himself, in the painting – slightly displaced to the right of the central canvas, so that an arm and a leg jut over into the third canvas (the perspective shifts over the gap between the works). The hand of this second character stands out as a strange black forward facing surface, towards the viewer, like a keyhole or a defensive gesture. (Or is it the hand of a pantomime, frisking an unseen wall from the inside?) With it a kind of dance is performed, this second-first-the-same character, on a floor of black and white piano keys. (Don't these keys look exactly like the comic eyes of his face?) Maybe he is not dancing at all, rather he slips out onto the image's piano keys. (And, in the end, is he peering with his piano eyes – swinging back to the first-same-left-standing character – at himself?)

This triptych literally plays out across a piano keyboard that functions as a cartoon and a narrative: almost like a sequential comic strip from left to right over three canvases. Likewise, it oscillates between formal and figurative elements and abstract moments. Black keys. White keys. At first glance it is incredibly open and inviting, you want to "read" these paintings (and you think you can as well). But then, they close again. They are too encrypted. Like the strange movement of the right clown in the image: equal parts dance and glissade. And the reason you can't really get into these images is because, as a viewer, you are already in them and it is no longer clear what you see from where. Then: the second-first-left-clown, isn't that one's self? To a certain extent, yes. To a certain extent, no. Because to follow this approach through to the end would be to force too much narration. Too much "reading", too little "seeing". But that's what the other clown is for. He raises his abstract hand. Stop! Or something like that.

Second canvas: Again, this guy, this time in an empty movie theater. Again, he is on the left edge, looking into a dark and vacant room – deserted chairs, empty, imageless screen. His mouth gaping once again, his eyes open wide once more. Again there is an element of abstraction, this time it is effectively presented: the empty colored surfaces of the movie theater screen, embedded in a figurative setting, almost as though it is an experimental arrangement about seeing – or rather a

comically-desperate exaltation. Because there is no other way. How does one transport the image inside the image, summon the vision of seeing, without running the risk of being too didactic? Precisely. The best form of self-reflection, if that's where we're at, is always laughing at one's self. (Which does not mean that you don't take the problem seriously.)

Another painting (the last in this text, but not the last in the exhibition): This guy again. Two guys, to be exact. Or actually three? Introduced from the left and the right the now wellknown head enters as a mirrored image. Both eyes are half oriented backwards, towards the center of the canvas, partially gazing into each other's eyes. Their noses touch, becoming one. And this split nose and one of each of their eyes suddenly appear on the face of a halfpresent third character who seems to peer out from behind the image. The gaze inwards, to look into your own eyes – he recurs here with an askew but sexy squint. One always sees themselves. Both characters in the front are in a sunset – their noses are the sun – on the verge of a kiss.

I think this small, almost shy, image is beautiful. Everything comes together for me. The strategy of doubling and self-reference is one Wulff constantly plays with – the character observes the characters, the image is found in the image – always pushed further. Another thing is literally created out of reflections: a third image in the double image, a fourth image in the third, reflected as a backdrop once again in the first. It seems that this image satisfies itself. It no longer requires me as a viewer. At the very least, not on a didactic level. It does not have to present anything to me, it satisfies, almost in and of itself on an absurd level and precisely because of this, speaks to me in a different way. Because it has a strange, shimmering, not entirely tangible autonomy that could best be described as introspection. And this autonomy makes it an opponent. It illustrates nothing more. The guys in the paintings are exactly what's in front of them. And behind them. We still stand in front of the image for a bit and talk.

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