

Text by Elsa Vettier

“Peintures récentes” (Recent Paintings) is the sixth show featuring Matthieu Palud’s work to bear this same title. The title, laconic to say the least, does offer the advantage of telling nothing beforehand about what the artist’s pictures represent or express. It simply poses a relative unity of time – several months at most separating production and display – and place, i.e., the canvas. Through repeated phases that are occasionally spaced out over time, Matthieu’s painting accompanies the present without necessarily creating formal habits. Better still, the “recent” always seems to give free rein to the “new”, the upshot being that the artist’s output regularly goes unrecognized as his, that is, painted by the same person. There have been pictures, for example, that realistically depicted the shadows and light of certain household details (the first that I saw), followed by others that were very psychedelic, schematic, and fluorescent. I should perhaps point out here that Matthieu has never attended art school; I like to think that the reality of being a self-taught artist frees him from any program painting might be tasked with carrying out while allowing him to always do the same thing differently.

This time around it is three interiors (including a still life) and three portraits that are on view. Looked at closely, the portraits also seem domestic (caught before a window or against a mute background) and the whole gives off an impression that is narrowed, not to say confined.

It is a world of interiors with no way out, no vistas leading the eye elsewhere. The curtains are drawn, the perspectives blocked off. At the same time, this spare interior contains exactly what it should: a few pieces of fruit, friendly figures, and painting itself. For unlike the earlier eponymous exhibitions, the “recent paintings” of this show are both presented and represented. One of the pictures on display indeed figures three paintings set at the foot of a window, the window of Matthieu’s room. The three are very colorful and differ from each other. One depicts an apple green “pom” logo, the other is striped, and the third, more fluid, seems covered in puddles of various colors. In the background of the still life a small abstract painting can be seen. Matthieu produced these four pictures “for real” but decided not to exhibit them, at least not outside the space of the apartment/painting. They have nothing to do with the rather realist yellowish brown austere style he used to represent the interior containing them. As far as I know, this is the first time he gives a meta treatment to the coexistence of his different styles, lending this new group a more reflexive, even analytical tonality. Painting is put into perspective, the (uninhabited) interiors and (noncontextualized) figures have been separated. Nor is there any real continuity between the three portraits. Each of the men that Matthieu paints has his own manner, as if their look each time called for a new approach to representation or a different legacy for figurative painting. I am put in mind of 17th-century painting in several regards – Vermeer, for his window and painting-within-a-painting effects; Zurbaran with his sculptural cowls that cast shadows down on the faces beneath them. Painting is never recent; Matthieu Palud’s painting changes completely, then draws in, lets time go by and cuts itself off... sometimes.