

RENDERING TENSION BEYOND PAINTING



29 August - 1 November 2025

Artists: Tina Braegger, Chloé Delarue, Simone Holliger,
Lin Olschowka, Jacob Ott, Anastasia Pavlou

What we are speaking of here is the problem of tension. One could say: it is the central ontological misunderstanding. Take, for instance, the rake. A trivial garden tool, yes—and yet also a kind of proto-landscape-painter's instrument. Gilles (Deleuze) speaks of the diagram as a chaotic matrix that rescues painting from the trap of interpretation. But the moment the rake's tines are drawn across the diagram, something absurd occurs: the straight, ordering gesture of the rake produces, on the finished diagram, chaos itself. Order is the mother of catastrophe.

And is painting not precisely this? Much like a game of chess. I recall how, when we went to collect Tina's bears, she first had to finish a blitz chess game. Each move a catastrophe—or at least in painting, I mean. Not in Tina's chess match; she had it under control. Infinite possibilities, and precisely because of that, each individual move overturns what has already been seen, casting it into a new light, a new meaning. A motif may make it easier to begin, but what if it never ends?

According to Roman's description, Anastasia navigates this endless tension within a rigorously organized informel. Her transparent, slowly worked images save themselves onto the material side of painting.

But if the immaterial is to be captured. If, as in Lin's case, a real atmosphere is to be conjured, a few ghosts meticulously held fast on a pictorial surface—then paint becomes once again a space in which material and illusion contend for sovereignty of meaning.

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And what a dreadful word “painting” is, after all. A brush (actually just a tuft of hair) dipped into liquid. Why not a finger instead? Or why not dip the rake directly, or the diagram itself into paint? And if the canvas buckles, shifting into the third dimension, then how are we to construct any semblance of a coherent pictorial space at all? Simone’s works are already a step ahead, strolling cheerfully—absorbed in their own materiality—through the gallery.

The point, however, is this: everything reduces to light. It is not “painting.” It is nothing but reflected light. The neon tube casts it onto the picture, the picture throws it back into our eyes. Why not, then, like Chloé, bend the neon tube itself, or elegantly interlace it, and preserve the tension directly into the glass?

Yet tension is never merely physical. Tension is expectation. Let us remember: we all begin in a womb. Suddenly a finger presses against it from the outside. Inside, as a fetus, one experiences this grotesque bulge as a cosmic, unprecedented event: “My God, what is that?!” And then the bulge disappears. We breathe in relief, but immediately we miss it, longing only for its return. Voilà: the origin of tension. There is no way back.

I even attempted to paint a picture entirely without any tension. Not even stretched, just a rag hanging on the wall. But of course, that is the trap! The more tensionless the image, the more tense I became myself: when will I finally paint something really interesting again?

This is precisely where the potatoes enter the scene. They slumber in the soil, relaxed, unassuming, looking rather cute, with no visible ambition. But in the underground, they are no doubt already preparing the next great revolution.

Basel, 28 August, 2025

Jacob Ott on the exhibition “Rendering Tension beyond Painting”

Image: Jacob Ott, *Austria Blue*, 2024/25, 40 Potato-Lamps (resin and natural), LED-lights, plugs, cables, power strips, dimensions variable (ca. 350 × 400 × 300 cm)