

Artist: David Gruber  
Exhibition title: Verlautbarung  
Venue: EXILE, Vienna

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A Verlautbarung generally refers to a public announcement or proclamation. The term is typically associated with institutions, authorities, governments, churches, and similar bodies issuing decisions, decrees, or official statements, and therefore already carries distinctly institutional and authoritative connotations. It de-subjectivizes speech, shifting language from individual utterance to institutional voice. As such, a Verlautbarung is rarely merely informative; rather, it functions as an illocutionary act that produces, organizes, and transforms reality. “The exhibition is now open,” the gallery announces, and through the announcement, the opening is enacted.

With its title, David Gruber’s exhibition evokes precisely this form of official communication or institutional proclamation, without it initially becoming clear what exactly is being “verlautbart.” In place of explicit verbal statements, one primarily encounters small-scale paintings – and with them the question of painting’s propositional capacity. Often no larger than roughly 50 × 30 cm, the works depict the interiors of Hellraiser masks accumulated from Ebay images. Yet in none of the paintings can these pictorial objects be clearly identified either as masks or as photographs. Their legibility is placed in visual tension with the narrow vertical formats that alienate and fragment them. Instead, the nailheads appear as painted dots that begin to suggest grid structures, referring not only to the masks themselves but also to the picture surface. At the same time, the paintings establish a relation between mask and body insofar as body parts – ears, eyes, occasional traces of a face – emerge within them, as if reflecting whoever might inhabit the mask from behind. Sometimes these forms appear organic, at other times rather symbolic: they oscillate between skin, grid, mask, and face, between extreme proximity and slight distance, generating a somewhat uncanny uncertainty about where interior and exterior, surface and body, actually begin and end.

Put differently, the paintings invite a “sustaining of recognition”. Perception is not conceived here as immediate or passive apprehension, but as an active, temporal, and reflexive process. This becomes especially significant in relation to the Verlautbarung. Gruber’s paintings do not simply disclose meaning, transmit information, or confront the viewer with an already constituted reality. Rather, they evoke processes of relating, tracing, and differentiating, presenting themselves as organized processes of becoming visible. This aspect also prevents the works from being understood merely as distanced acts of appropriation. While they operate through mediated and circulating images, they combine these with formal and material decisions as well as affective elements that resist a purely appropriative logic. The Verlautbarung thus seems to consist precisely in this paradoxical articulation of an opacity whose structural role in acts of visualization is foregrounded by works such as the blue affiche paper in Reverse Schemata (Opacity), which renders the poster visible, or the pigment Bianco San Giovanni, which intensifies the layers of color painted above it.

The Verlautbarung, then, concerns painting itself, its possibilities and aporias in the present. The matte, slowing medium of tempera painting, the Bianco San Giovanni, whose recipe can be traced back to the late medieval painter Cennino Cennini, and the mask photographs extracted from the circuits of pop-cultural marketing all point toward an allegorical impulse. This impulse proceeds not from immediacy, originality, or stable meaning, but from the appropriation, recontextualization, and belatedness of already existing images, techniques, and cultural fragments. This dynamic is intensified further through the proto-serial small scale of the works, in which painting acquires intensity precisely by relinquishing scale, totality, and the immediacy of shock (a quality otherwise central to Hellraiser’s aesthetics of horror). At the same time, this impulse remains precarious. Returns to historical forms, subjectivities, and aesthetic models of the art work always carry, alongside critical distance, the potential for reactivation. Here lies the productive tension of these works: they operate on a narrow threshold between a reflexive, medially fractured image practice and the danger of regressive reliance on traditional forms of authority through which lost wholeness, authenticity, or painterly aura might seemingly be restored. The Verlautbarung is this aporia.