

# SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY

Press Release - September 2015

HENRIK EIBEN

We are pleased to be able to show Henrik Eiben's first solo exhibition at SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY, parallel to the presentation of his work at this year's abc in Berlin.

The exhibition *Henrik Eiben - la grande ombra* contains new works by the artist, who lives and works in Hamburg. In his oeuvre, he negotiates spatiality and questions the medium of painting.

*Being There* (2015), installed directly opposite the entrance, consists of 17 equal-sized steel triangles, some of which were sprayed or varnished; others owe their rusty surface to having been exposed to the elements. As if touched by a blow of wind, parts of the work protrude into the room. One is tempted to push them against the wall and thus join the triangles back together, so that they turn into a rectangle. Perhaps we feel reminded of the Chinese game tangram - supposedly a young student monk tried for days in vain to reassemble a ceramic tablet that had broken into seven pieces, or so the story goes. Instead of finding the original form, he learned about the unlimited variety of patterns and images.

After we grasp the playful composition and the various surfaces, *Being There* raises the following questions: What are we dealing with here? Is it a sculpture? Or is it a painting? After all, paint was applied to a support. And this raises an important aspect of Eiben's artistic practice: his questioning the medium of painting, how he takes it to its limit.

The same concern lies behind the large, multi-part work *Crosby* (2015). On the one hand, the individual elements seem like set pieces of a large-format painting, on the other hand, this work, too, is an object and invites us to look at it from various perspectives. In both pieces, the wall is an integral part of the work. Foreground and background are linked, the unevenness of the wall ruptures the smooth surfaces of the individual shapes. And not last, the wall becomes the support for the *grande ombra*, the shadow play resulting from the three-dimensional elements and the colours. In *Being There*, a steel plate protruding into the room, painted on the back, throws a reddish shadow onto the wall, in many places the light falling in traces contours, creating additional shapes. This effect is continued in the exhibition with *Lamar* (2015), *Crosby* and *Tambourine* (2015). The two latter works also surprise us with differently coloured edges that are to be discovered.

The size and presence of these works in the space are countered by the more reticent, but by no means discreet watercolours. So a walk through this exhibition becomes, as it were, a walk through the artist's varied oeuvre. The play with colours and shapes origins in the four exhibited watercolours (all from 2015), they are, as he himself puts it, the artist's "pool of inspiration". These delicate compositions lead to the ideas for the object-like works that reflect on their media.

The ruptures or constructive interruptions that appear in the exhibition as a whole can also be found in the individual works themselves: different shapes, colours, and materials are combined into a new, consistent whole. Like tangram, Eiben's artistic practice is a game where what supposedly doesn't fit is joined together.

As much as these works may lead us to associate them with examples of minimal art because of their reduced formal vocabulary, they succeed in rupturing the formal rigour of the minimalists with wit and a tongue-in-cheek attitude. For example, only after closer examination do we discover supposed imprecisions in *Tambourine* and *Crosby*: the panels differ in terms of thickness, sometimes refuse to fit together precisely, and here and there an element seems to have moved slightly out of place. In this way, the sculptural works gain some of the spontaneity and lightness of the watercolours.

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We cordially invite you to the opening reception on 10 September from 6-8 pm at SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY, Sanderstraße 28, Berlin-Neukölln.

During the 'Gallery Night' on 16 September 2015, the gallery will remain open from 6-9 pm.