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Cornelia Baltes: Drunk Octopus wants to fight. Limoncello
14 January - 20 February 2016

Graphic interplay between revealing and disguise - the opening steps of this show immediately corner you. Two paintings; 'Steve' (2015) the back of a pair of spray-on jeggings or jeans, hieroglyphic of the contemporary age, and 'Fin' (2016), who is physically hung away from the incoming guest. Like an awkward party, your first greeting upon entering Cornelia Baltes' solo show at Limoncello generates a set of assumptions which you must endeavour to enable or dismiss in a quest to figuratively define the work.

The stark hang is refreshingly stimulating for a painting show, giving you time to step back and analyse the gestural moments at play while not bombarding you with too much information. The simplicity of what you have here and the ability to ask you to work harder to gather the requisite information assures a pleasant reliance on the viewer to genuinely question the genesis for each image. Could 'Monika' (2016) be reminiscent of sports socks, 'Greg' (2016) reminders of hot drinks left on a teak coffee table, 'Cindy' (2016) a nail salon standard manicure? Baltes' gestural ambience plays tricks with our requirement to create standards with which to visually assess and acknowledge what something is in order to feel comforted by it, assured or potentially capable of critiquing it.

Playing devil's advocate with symbolism, Baltes' work acts as a dialogue between recognition and obscurity. How best we attempt to gain access to the relevance of our visual language and culture boils down to the reliance we have on it to generate content, information and dialogue. There's a communication issue here that Baltes seems to be insinuating, that not much is gained by adhering to a structure that enables the viewer to contextualise, analyse and move on. That we should stop and question what we encounter and ask of it harder questions. That we should expect more from the images placed before us and not feel so continually comforted when we know their relevance.

Can we ever look towards a moment in which our imagery and visual language is truly autonomous? Baltes seems to allude to another gestural space that recalibrates the forgotten unwanted visuals of the 21st Century and with this, her show acts as an archive of lost or abandoned tropes. It might seem more forsaken had Baltes not crafted such an exuberant and witty approach to her painting style.

While I could possibly indulge painting fans in a rhetoric on abstraction via Baltes' graphic application of monochrome, block and graduated colour, I feel it might be more fruitful to dwell on the emotional potential for the work as clarification of our ability to engage and form associations with frameworks of cultural significance. Baltes seems to remind us not to be too trustworthy of those who create the content we so heavily rely on to form our opinions: the media, advertising, street art, fashion, contemporary art. We can only engage in the potential for image-making as opposed to its responsibility. Baltes seems to intentionally leave us at a junction which is far more emancipating than it is of concern. It is a reminder that our relationship with visual culture may inform the genetic make-up of our society but ultimately it is us who decides how best to use that to relate to one another.