

Persona.

Looking At The Paintings of Rüté Merk

In Rüté Merk's paintings, the synthetic becomes the basis of the painterly gesture, prepared and informed by digital technologies and modes of image-making.

Merk's figures are abstract schemes, inserted into flat surrounding spaces as if roughly cut out. They exist detached from their surroundings, which mark less a real space than a media echo chamber or a shimmering screen. They float like ciphers; they become transparent and dissolve. The digital permeates these figures to such an extent that the associated devices no longer even need to be shown: a hand holds a cell phone, which we understand without seeing it. Merk's protagonists radiate a peculiar calm. Their attitude is that of dignitaries, saints. They are heroines without revolution. In their countless superimpositions of person and persona, inwardness and superficiality, space and figure they are people of our time: full of the present, but without a past; without a future.

These self-referential, global citizens wear outfits that look the same all over the world: *Business Casual* or *Leisurewear*. It's more than a look, it's a lifestyle: Merk's Millennials are equally fragile, isolated and hyper-connected. Networking and constant accessibility have long since become the norm. The globalized, neoliberal market demands constant addressability, engagement, activity; while aspects such as withdrawal, quiet, autonomy and intimacy are neglected. There is no offline, no end. But recently Merk's protagonists* turn away from the spectacles. „Lucy“ returns to a luminous water landscape. Her body seems to disintegrate - into data, as in the film of the same name?

„I like relinquishing control,“ says Rüté Merk. „I interact with the aesthetic decisions of other people who are responsible for an image. So it's possible for me to find things that I would never have arranged that way myself.“

This premise gives rise to surprisingly classical questions to painting: what is the materiality of a human body or a piece of clothing, and how can I represent them painterly? How can the movement of water be shown, how the elasticity of the leaves of a blossom, the texture of a piece of fruit? But beware: the allure of the perfect, shiny object hints to a darker context: the *hard-edged* stylistics of her protagonists and motifs of artificially produced foods and flowers refer to the realities of a technologically moulded existence and the all-encompassing processes of industrialisation and bio-engineering.

Merk's paintings are created from data, prototypes, renderings. Yet they are tactile and ultra-present. Human bodies, apricots, orchids, Matcha Latte: artificially created and genetically engineered for a world without a future, but full of brilliance.

People and objects in these paintings embody different scales and chapters of time: deep geological time, the technological period of *Big Data*, the generational moment of alienated millennials, and the personal, phenomenal time of daily experiences. These specific moments shape their existence uncircumventably. In Merks paintings, there is no longer a separation of image and essence, natural or artificial, of yesterday and tomorrow.

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