

Press Release

Erik Schmidt | Working the landscape

May 3 – June 7, 2008

Opening: May 2, 6–9 pm

Gallery Weekend: May 3–4, 2008, 11 am – 6 pm

We are delighted to celebrate the opening of our new space on Markgrafenstrasse with “Working the landscape”, the new solo exhibition by Erik Schmidt. In the past Schmidt has explored the theme of hunting and the aesthetics of its social forms. In the current show he turns his attention to the archaic symbols of “wine, olives and shepherds” in the Holy Land.

In 2007 Erik Schmidt paid several visits to Ella Valley, a winery situated between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Similar to his approach to hunting, he moved about as a stranger and artist in the small functioning society of Thai guest workers, Bedouins and Israeli winemakers. Schmidt observed both the landscape and people working the fields, and he focuses on the non-spectacle, on the archaic work at the winery. These are motifs that would be lost due to their ordinariness if they were not painted. Herds of sheep, withered shrubs, workers picking olives, the landscape surrounding the wine-growing areas, simmering with heat – such are the focused glimpses of a stranger in a land whose image has been preshaped by the media.

Schmidt travels through the Holy Land as an observer of his own view of the world, taking up the reflections cast by Romantic thought onto the landscape and translating them into painting. This kind of painting, which reconstructs his special view, and the Holy Land, regarded as the focus of religious and political longing, circle around the same distanced subject, one consisting of longing, faith and fetishism. The motifs from the Holy Land are transformed through painting into interpretable codes of the present world, and they merge the place of their genesis, so rich in associations, with Schmidt’s luscious oil paintings.

The works shown in “Working the landscape” oscillate between the figurative representation of their motifs and the abstract loss of control over the paint, which is layered, pulled and scraped on the canvas in heavy streaks. The orderly pointillé of his early oil works, displaying a machinelike precision, has given way to highly condensed spatial masses of paint that alternate with monochrome surfaces. The motifs frequently dissolve into colour, and it is only by rearranging the work with the eye that we are able to piece the elements back together into something identifiable as a thorn bush, grape picker or herd of sheep. Schmidt evokes a historical paradigm of painting by showing it to be a medium that can be experienced physically in all its multiple facets as a permanent deception, projection surface and fetish of the gaze.

In addition to painting, Schmidt reflects on the status of his own artistic existence. Drawing on historical artistic roles, he has conceptually refined his understanding of the artist as an independent, contemplative figure at the periphery of social life. This is revealed in the genealogy of his themes, moving from men in suits and large city architecture to the rituals of hunting and the current Middle Eastern landscapes. One of the central aspects of Schmidt’s art is its ongoing concern with the code of the picture, which transfers some of the stereotypes of its origins to the contemporary iconography of the artist, who applies his own artistic layer to the image. Like the Holy Land itself, which serves as a melting pot and focal point for three world religions, as a construct of faith, imagination and political desire, Schmidt develops a style of painting that plays with these archaic forces and represents their Romantic code.

Following Schmidt’s solo exhibition at the MARTa Herford Museum in 2007 and solo shows in Madrid, Paris and New York, “Working the landscape” is the fourth solo exhibition presented at carlier | gebauer. An artist publication with a text by April Elizabeth Lamm will be issued on the occasion of the exhibition.

For further information and photographs please contact Philipp Selzer at ps@carliergebauer.com or at +49 30 2400 863 0.