

ART AND CAKE

A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the Los Angeles Art Scene

BioPerversity at Nicodim

By Shana Nys Dambrot

We tend to use anthropomorphized animals as proxies in metaphors and morality plays, fairy tales and Freudian projections, tattoos and illuminated manuscripts. Old myths are full of half human, half animal creatures, often gods or at least demigods. Minotaur, mermaid, centaur, Anubis, wood nymphs, Dracula. Human children Romulus and Remus suckled at a wolf's breast and went on to found Rome. Planet of the Apes, Beauty and the Beast, Leda and the Swan, A Midsummer Night's Dream. For god's sake, The Shape of Water now. But also Black Panther, so that's cool. In classic mythology, psychoanalysis, and children's fairy tales, the porousness of borders — between past and present, human and animal, fact and folklore, dream and reality — is important for coming to terms with harsher experiences like death, disease, injustice, heartbreak, and the war for survival. For some people, especially artists, the use of these displaced symbols only deepens with time, expanding to include nostalgia, wisdom, irony, political and social commentary, mind expanding drugs, all kinds of personal dysfunctions, and an impressive array of inventive sexual variations.

For some artists, relationships to the natural world bypass metaphor and pop culture altogether and go straight for the raw, abstract foundations of how life comes to be. We are talking bacteria, rust, lava, blood, fly shit — some nasty primordial dangers in which the impulses toward growth and entropy are not merely rendered, but directly enacted in material ways. Death, while stipulated as inevitable, is treated with a range of stances from the esoteric to the necrophiliac, mocking, fetishistic, chic, and worshipped. There's a lot of sex the whole time. And consumerism, and materialism, and oh yeah, species extinction and organized religion. Just about every one of the assembled 60+ works celebrates some form of physical mutation and/or soft-core bestiality. There really aren't that many humans, per se. Which is ultimately why, though the show presents itself as a bit of a freak show or at least a cabinet of curiosities, in the end, it's the human audience that is out of our element, and are left questioning who are the true perverts — those who flaunt their proclivities, or those who deny freedom to their own true selves. I should probably mention, it's also frequently hilarious.

So there are two basic ways to curate a group show, especially one on this scale. Either by shared formal or material attributes, or thematically, to examine an idea. If you've got an idea, you might actually want a literary, eclectic array, mixing emerging with a-list, international with local; and of course all the mediums, all the perspectives of identity, all the categories of imagery and processes, materials and messages, historical and avant-garde. It's exciting. But it still has to look good in a room. Guest curator John Knuth (whose own art in the show involved fly puke, naked men, and live snakes, in no particular order) worked with the gallery's Global Director (and man having all the fun at work) Ben Lee Ritchie Handler to flesh out the aspects of this self-evidently manifest premise. In a nutshell: It's all wrong, but it's alright.

The best way to experience the installation is to dive in and wander through, take a meandering path through this Boschian garden, making your own connections. The whole point is to do whatever you want and follow your instincts, even the dark ones. There is literally not one piece of bad or even mediocre art in the whole place, and there are frequent flashes of brilliance. If there's one word of direction to offer however, it is to stay vigilant and be watchful for the show's quieter, less attention-grabbing moments — those who linger and look closer will be rewarded. Read the playlist on the Otterson jukebox, peer into the painting within the painting in the 10×12 inch Savu, decide if the guy getting fucked by a frog in the Boadwee series is enjoying himself, appreciate what it might mean that the Andres Serrano is the most meditative, reverential work in the show. Ask what the Inoue boxes contain (hint: it's alive), what the Cichocki "paintings" are made of (hint: it's not paint), or why the Hansen "geodes" are more miraculous than the real thing. Decide for yourself if the Ballens are staged, if the knives will cut you, or what the holes in Mitchell's ceramics are for. Go ahead, you might just surprise yourself.

Art Viewer

Float in a Dark Tank
Yautepec, Mexico City

Keith Boadwee
James Krone
Morgan Mandalay



Stavro Goomo, 2016 Oil and graphite on canvas, 80 x 50 cm

Don't ask questions, just try this!
I've never been a fan of enclosed spaces, silence, or the dark for that matter.
Inside this chamber, you become the sound.
You can hear your heart beating and lungs pumping.
My stomach is gurgling louder now.
I'm a nervous nelly with A ZILLION questions (will I feel claustrophobic? will I be weirded out by what it is? what if I freak out and want to get out?)
and I just relaxed and had an amazing time and left feeling...weightless.
The first couple minutes my mind was abuzz with random thoughts
but as I focused on my breathing, I became increasingly relaxed.
Like I'd just gotten a massage.
Like I'd just meditated.
Like I'd just slept for a day.
And this is a very disorienting experience.
How did I end up naked in a stranger's apartmentmentmentment?
To float in a dark space can be a leap of faith.
As your eyes adjust you see things.
Maybe they aren't even there. You don't have any cues. Any clues.
You take away the perceptual cues that allow you to balance and manoeuvre. It's our go to escape fantasy.

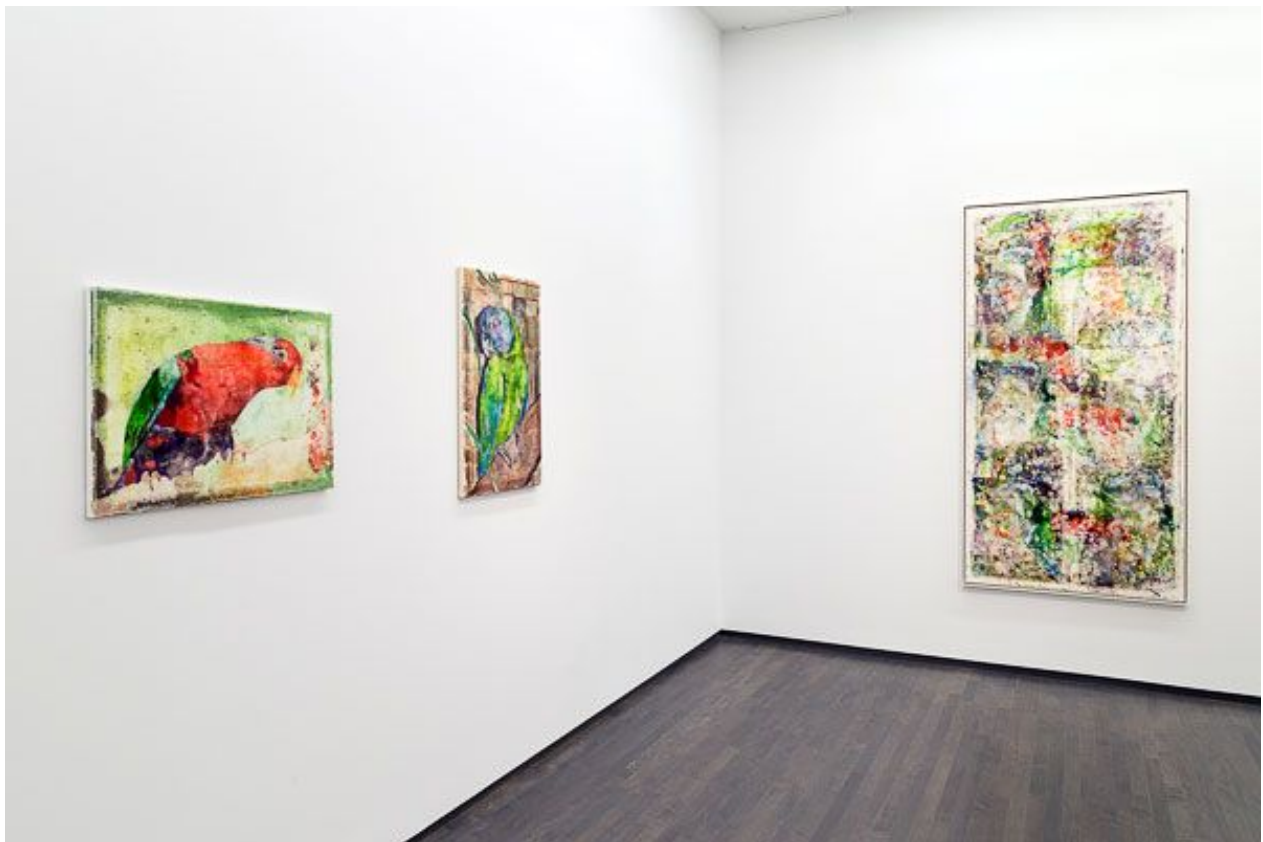
CHICAGO

An Ornithology for Birds

Kavi Gupta, Chicago
January 2016

By Jason Foumberg

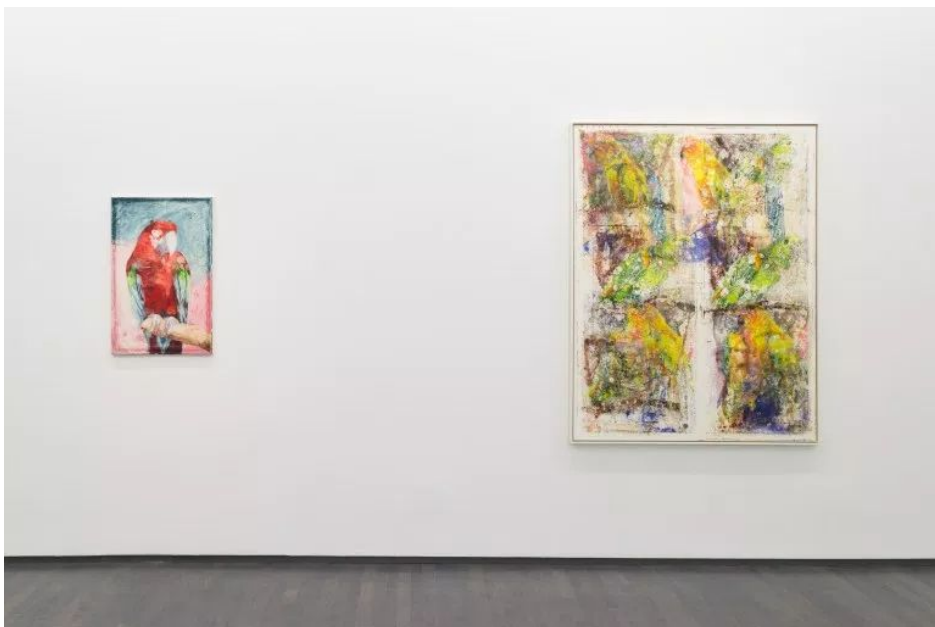
THROUGH 2/20 An Ornithology for Birds. The fourth solo show at the gallery by Berlin artist James Krone reveals the breadth of his experimentation, including acrylic faux fingernails sculpted into spirals, a series of bird paintings that devolve into fuzzy abstraction, and a new film about child prodigies. 835 W. Washington.



An Ornithology for Birds

Kavi Gupta, Chicago
January 2016

By Stephen F. Eisenman



RECOMMENDED

In 1952, the painter Barnett Newman dismissed philosophical aesthetics by saying: “Even if aesthetics is established as a science, it doesn’t affect me as an artist. I’ve done quite a bit of work in ornithology; I have never met an ornithologist who ever thought that ornithology was for the birds.” Newman later turned his quip into a simple analogy “Aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds.”

It is easy to see why James Krone, a conceptualist with a mobile style, chose the sentence, shortened to “An Ornithology for Birds,” as the title for his latest exhibition. For one thing, most of the works depict birds, parrots to be precise. For another, the works are mediated by theory. His approach is the following: 1) draw a parrot on a canvas; 2) cover it thickly with oil paint; 3) use the painting as a matrix, impressing it in a grid pattern upon a larger canvas until the paint is exhausted; 4) consider the original, shot painting, and the bigger painting finished works of art.

The results are intriguing, with echoes of William Blake and Max Ernst who also employed monoprint techniques, Robert Rauschenberg who employed transfer printing in his combines, and Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol who repeated signs and images until their meanings were depleted. Krone’s effigies are many times removed from any actual bird; he has thus created “an ornithology” he supposes meaningless for birds.

NYAQ / LXAQ / SFAQ

James Krone: "Catsuit for Men"

Night Gallery

2276 E 16th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90021

March 8–April 5, 2014

By Gladys-Katherina Hernando

Known for his deliberately choreographed aesthetic procedures, Berlin-based artist James Krone brings a new series of haunting paintings, an installation, and a video to the project space Night Gallery in Los Angeles. Through repetition, process, and a veiled series of plays on language, Krone creates a subtle framework to address signifiers of desire and the reciprocity of exchange.

In a series of Spell paintings with such titles as "Catsuit for Men," "Leather Woman," and "Misty Cherry," Krone exhibits six paintings in various sizes that are created by pouring men's knock-off colognes onto the canvases and lighting them on fire. In shades of brown and cream, similar in form to Yves Klein's fire paintings, the subsequent burn marks create a palimpsest that recalls the shape of a pentagram. Krone's source lies in the linguistic realm of ancient mysticism and traditional witchcraft, in which he layers a sigil onto the canvas to create an abstract symbol. Their dark, minimalist aesthetic borders on formalist painting, yet recall the occult in the index of a smothered flame.

Hanging from the top of the walls are multiple gold belts linked to create long, vertical chains. The belts function simply, connected to each other, they bracket the space of the paintings in the gallery. As a gaudy adornment, the belts recall the counterfeit industry that exists across the globe and the desire for a glamorous image. Yet, with their orange-yellow color, the belts fail in their embellishments to duplicate a high-class object as they rest in their place between the paintings as punctuation. The faux gold sparkles; animals and leather make a simple gesture, connecting to themselves if only for the sake of connection.

In a video titled "Rochambeau," a magician's hand in a white glove plays a game of rock, paper, scissors through a glory hole. The title, meaning to disambiguate in French, gives the piece and the game an aimless quality, one of endless choice, possibility, or chance in a repetitive loop. The social construct of a glory hole is a kind of anti-sculpture, to borrow the artist's term, that disrupts the social contract of intimacy and selection. The video retains a relationship to the paintings by further breaking down the barriers of communication that exist by rejecting a fundamental form of communication.

Despite the urge to claim these works as a visceral reaction to consumerism, it remains latent within it. Krone negates the translation of his objects into legible language, allowing only small, momentary connections to be made. These objects carry the weight of their meaning, yet they are halted by their illegibility. Though there is recognition of the materials as sources of power or prowess, they are disregarded as such. Krone presents a wonderfully complex project that demands serious consideration in the midst of what feels like a lighthearted display of formalist strategies.



Image: *Arrogance for Men #2*, 2014 perfume and fire on canvas with artist's frame

ARTSLANT

CATSUIT FOR MEN

JAMES KRONE

Night Gallery

2276 East 16th Street, 90021 Los Angeles, CA, US

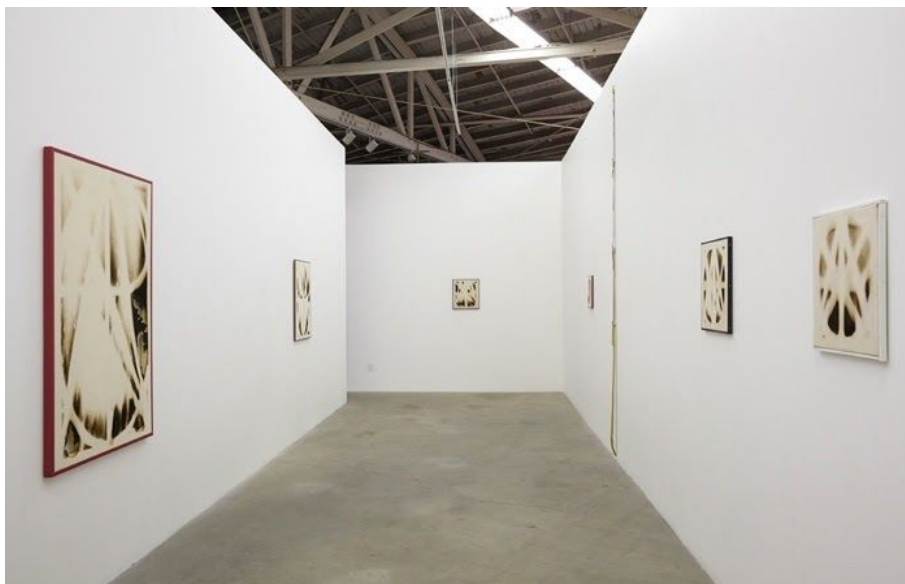
March 8, 2014 - April 5, 2014

BEAUTIFUL AND SAD AND CLASSY

BY CHRISTINA CATHERINE MARTINEZ

Remember the ritualistic daubing of perfume in preparation for a type of tryst, a slow, light movement on fingertips over the erogenous zones—perhaps more crass, but no less spiritual in its fervor—when one either anticipates, or more likely hopes to conjure the promise of carnal knowledge.

Maybe no one actually does this. The last person I saw do this to herself was a celluloid bimbo in a horror movie. Rest assured, she got hers in the end, according to the gospel of this moralistic genre, but I maintain that this gesture is holy, even if its most fervent practitioners are merely martyrs of pop phantasmagoria.



The bottle she dipped from was chintzy and anonymous. It could have been any of the petit-bourgeois elixirs for which James Krone's Spell Paintings are named—Leather Woman, Misty Cherry, Catsuit for Men—titles which betray their otherwise classy surface and process, which evokes more chic forms of magic still practiced to this day by trustafarian tribes in the hills of Laurel Canyon, but the word 'classy' has a precarious magic of its own: it has the power to undermine itself at the very moment of utterance.

They're funny only because they're beautiful, dead serious, super defiant and also super fragile. Postwar surface planes were attacked with raw despair. Here, only the areas left untouched by these commodity-chemicals of desire, this liquid self-delusion, are burnt to a crisp, flaked-off, disappeared.

M. L^EBLANC

I catch a glimpse of the artist from across the room. He's wearing a bedazzled denim jacket loudly bearing his (or at least someone's) zodiac sign. This is also beautiful and sad and 'classy'; the faux-Swarovski Pisces fish leaping and gleaming, signaling to any Aries, Tauruses, or Geminis: I'm here.

Our broadcasts may be feeble; pedestrian alchemy toward pedestrian purposes, but a newly-minted famous person in a baby blue Cinderella dress told me via live satellite broadcast that my dreams are valid.

There's a song lyric I heard a while ago that still gets stuck in my head every so often: hope is a white hand that moves through my body. It seemed obscure and impenetrable at the time, but I get it now. It's a magician's glove.



Rochambeau Part 1 (still), 2013 2 Channel HD video

Art in Berlin: *Best of abc*

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2013 *by Mary Scherpe*



The best paintings are usually not photographable, since radiating colors and gleaming layers aren't easily depicted and that's an important part of their beauty. Kavi Gupta is presenting five of over forty paintings of James Krone. All have the same motif but were created consecutively with one square painted a day – they're all alike, yet different. Additionally they say men from about 60 years on will have an increasingly harder time to actually see these colors and layers. Krone is in his late thirties, which means he still has some time left to create even more.

MOUSSE

EXHIBITIONS Milan

James Krone "Waterhome: We Is Somebody Else"

Brand New Gallery, Milan



Waterhome is the factory name of an aquarium that was given to me as a gift a few years ago. I decided that I didn't want any animals living in my house so I just filled the aquarium with water. The aquarium began to produce layers of algae that would eventually die and fall from the glass walls of the tank. This fallen algae would decompose and the aquarium would continue to produce more algae. I was attracted to the constant production of the tank. The production was the narrative and this narrative would end and then repeat and end and repeat and so on, without any sort of progression or goal.

I began to make paintings on glue sized canvas that I had intended to stand in as locations for me to reenact the actions of the aquarium. I chose four colors that I perceived in the algae or that combine to match certain colors suggested by the algae. I paint one monochromatic layer of paint on the canvas per day and stop when the canvas appears to be a light absorbing, ruddy black, so that I can discern no change from further accretion of paint. Flaws in the canvas support allow the paint to bleed through the surface in an incidental, patternless manner. While the fronts of these paintings is where I behave as the aquarium "behaves", the surfaces themselves are inchoate, refusing to speak of pictorial reference beyond an ostensibly black monochrome which if having any sign value is as a sign for the historical black monochrome. The areas where the pigment bleeds through the canvas make the reverse sides appear to resemble, mimetically, the algae covered walls of the aquarium. I decide randomly whether or not to leave the paintings as I painted them or whether to unstretch and reverse them, exposing the side that appears to be subjective but is, in fact, a blind material composition.

The aquarium isn't a painter's object like a bowl of pears is or a view from my studio window, a patient sitter in a chair, a photograph of any of these things or even a structuralist allegory is. It is more like a cathedral without a religion. In this way, as a shell for performative inhabitation, it is a vessel for drag. Indistinguishable as a subject or an object I use it as an attempt to drown out any narrative of artistic progress that could be read as a lesson of biographical accumulation. Where my attempt fails to pass is where it exposes my desire to refrain from the courtship games of expressionistic self diarizing.

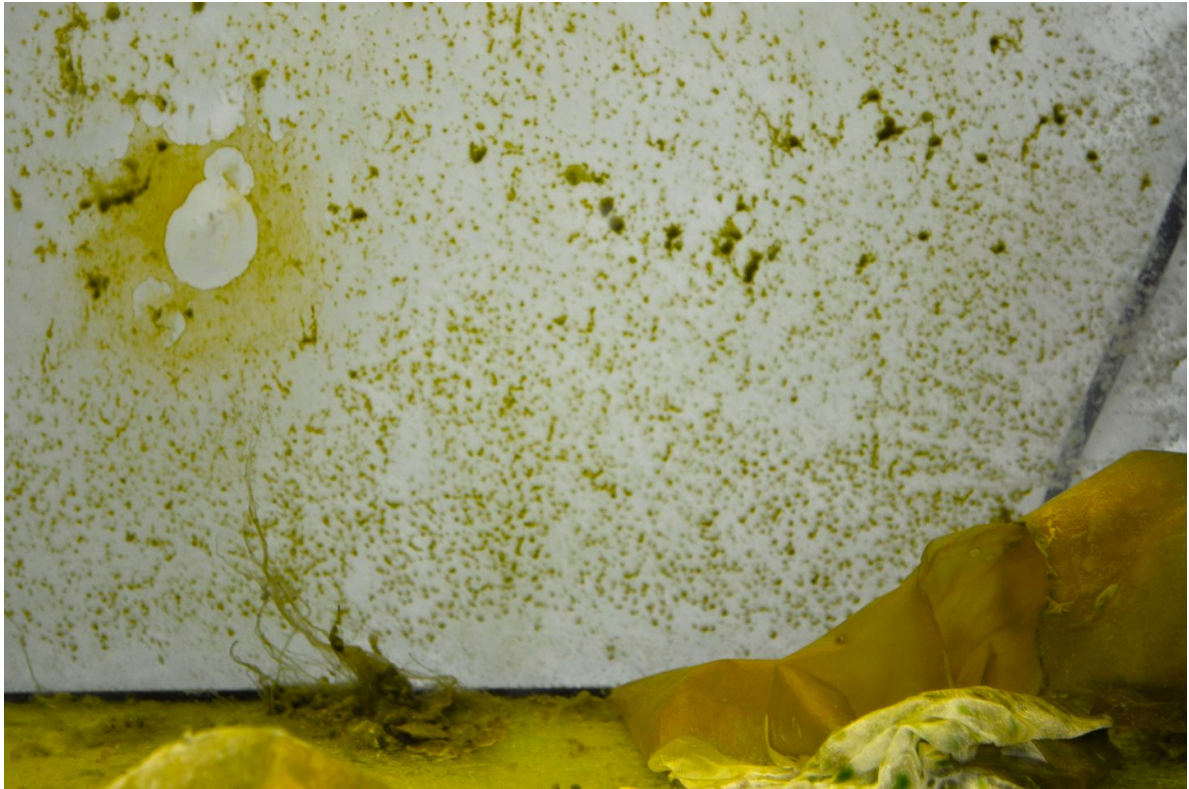
The exhibitions I've made with this work relate to each other as different iterations yet they never seem to resolve an ideal presentation for the work. What is causal in the paintings isn't necessarily transferable to the expectations of exhibition. There have been arrangements describing the process and content and there have been arrangements that have masked it, mocked it, occasionally undermining whatever delicate potential for meaning might exist there by masochistically repositioning elements of the work as decorative artifice or as functional objectification. Eventually the exhibits come down and I begin again.

JK 2013

Waterhome

M. L^EBLANC

Waterhome
Kavi Gupta, Chicago
December 2012



MODERN PAINTERS MAGAZINE

Algae provided an unlikely guide for Krone's paintings. Inspired by the overgrowth in a fish tank he kept at home, the artist uses oil paints to mimic both the process and effects on canvas. Hung on the wall, stacked in groups, and standing on the gallery floor like Japanese screens, each work posits painting as an organically evolving process, rife with stains, fades, and uneven saturation. The most interesting works are the darkest: layer upon layer of oil produce an opaque, depthless surface reminiscent of the bottom of the sea.

- Nova Benway



Waterhome
Kavi Gupta, Berlin

Continuing through February 2, 2013

A patina of splotches and stains besmirch the black and white color field paintings titled "Waterhome" by Chicago born, Berlin based artist, James Krone. Though the oil on canvas works have a clear relationship to minimalist painting, they also reference an unusual source: an algae filled aquarium. Inspired by the way algae continuously builds on and crumbles from the sides of a fish tank, Krone parallels this natural process through the application and removal of various colors of paint on the rabbit skin glue covered canvases. The colors that remain stained on the canvas blend towards black and natural discrepancies in the surfaces create chance yet controlled compositions. Among a number of works hung like traditional paintings, seven canvases are stacked face to face upon a low pedestal, highlighting the edges that bear the bleed of the painted layers. In "Waterhome Dressing Screen II," five panels are attached and freestanding, displaying both sides so that viewers can fully examine the seductive results of Krone's labor intensive process.

Robin Dluzen





A Performance of Accidental Intrusions: An Interview with James Krone

by Caroline Picard

Dec 21, 2012

Everything I've read about Berlin-based painter, James Krone's, recent exhibit *Waterhome* centers Krone's practice around an empty aquarium. The aquarium in question, however, is not present in the exhibit itself. Instead you'll find a series of paintings hung on the wall, a folding screen dividing the room that is similarly composed of paintings and a stack of paintings face up on a plinth. These monochrome works seem at first either black or white. At first they appear unpainted, as though they were salvaged from a musty basement and hung as testaments of mold and unforgiving sunlight. The marks on the canvas seem to have grown over pure blankness, or pure darkness like intrusions of time and environment. Slowly, upon closer inspection the range of color becomes apparent, the areas of bleaching and stretch marks conspire to create a cohesive, aesthetic experience. The image of a tank collecting algae is tied in with this work, and I kept asking myself how it with its self-generating, dynamic ecosystem connected to painting, especially when these paintings speak so directly to minimalism, and abstraction. *Waterhome* opened this past Saturday and will be up until February 2nd at Kavi Gupta Gallery. All images courtesy of the gallery.

Caroline Picard: *I am interested in the relationship between your paintings and this fish tank – an object that seems present in everything I've read about your work, even while it is absent from the physical exhibition space. Without the fish tank, I experience your paintings as these lovely, subtle color fields that reflect back on a collective/historical painting conversation your works strike me as non-painting paintings, almost. They have been crafted in such a way as to seem like canvases left in a damp basement for an extended period of time flecks of paint look like tiny blotches of mold peppering the surface. And yet, by incorporating this fish tank, even as a (non-present) totem of the work, your paintings engage the natural world as well. I have started to fixate on this fish tank. What is its relationship to your paintings? Does it function as a muse of some sort? Or does it have a more direct relationship to your painting process?*

James Krone: The fish tank was something that I had, was given as a gift at one point because I had wanted a pet lobster. I had some miscommunication with the electrical company at the time and my power kept going off. I was worried that if I put a lobster in the tank and the electrical company turned off the power again, the lobster would die. Also, I realized what a lot of work it would be to maintain a salt water tank. Instead of getting rid of the tank I filled it with water and put it on a table in my apartment and decided that that was enough. I couldn't tell if it was a sculpture or if I was just keeping water as a pet but I found it somewhat fascinating and it didn't take any effort to have it there. It was visible and transparent, recycling its qualities through an electric filter. It wasn't very long before algae started to grow in the water, a rather delicate layer of soft velvety chartreuse. I've never really thought of the algae as nature, primarily, so much as an inevitable form of production that was filling a void while simultaneously articulating my incapacity to maintain either an illusion of emptiness or a consistent object. I'm often seduced by points where assumed binaries falter and merge back into one another.

The accretion of the algae persisted and would get quite thorough, creating moments of total opacity and then it would die, or do something that appeared to be entropic, and just collapse off the sides of the tank in sheets of fibers. The process would repeat itself. It seems to be a form of decay but in fact its an active, matter subverting an otherwise sterile space. I admired the mindless production of its cycle and the revolutions of transparency and opacity, persistent and hungry yet apparently neither progressive nor resolute. It is

M. LÉBLANC

difficult to say whether the algae was a subject coming into being, a subject arrived sui generis or something that was destroying the subject. I think that the paintings work in this way, too.

CP: *It sounds like you see a process of painting in the aquariums inherent, or natural, process can you say more about it? How are those conversations wrapped up in one another for you?*

JK: I think of the aquarium's relationship to painting as being about the quotidian and transfiguration, being as a form of continuous maintenance, more than I think about it as nature. Or what is natural? A fungus that eats plastics was recently discovered in South America. I guess I see nature as the incomprehensible totality of everything and just shy away from the references that get associated with nature or the natural (organic, etc...) as they seem to suggest a necessary idea of the unnatural, that I can't accept.

Maybe if this idea of the unnatural were really just a prudish stand in for perversion then I'd have an easier time dealing with that.

Painting is a thing a person can do quite easily but it will most likely happen in an empty or undetermined space because it isn't a solicited activity, if it's of any value. There is no proper or prepared place to make a painting or art because no one is initially asked to do so. If I wanted to be a nurse or make sandwiches for people, there are rooms for me to go to that would be readymade. To make paintings I have to go get an empty room and bring my things there and the person who rents it to me probably says, "Don't get it on the floor."

CP: *You directly speak to the idea of entropy in the Waterhome exhibit description. I want to say this connects somehow to the blank canvas, or the empty fish tank. That these blank spaces inevitably fill up and get dirty. Is this where you are locating entropy? i.e. the fact that "the purity of the void" will be compromised marks a sign of failure? I'm interested in this idea because I feel like it's somehow based on a philosophical premise of your own, namely that something clean and clear and empty is an idealized state; the addition of mold/small flecks of green color, scuff marks, the apparent bleach of the sun, or errant stretch marks is the function of dilapidation. But you could also think of mold is an additive growth, a positive, productive transformation. And the signs of age and dilapidation on your canvases are fabricated by you which also seems additive. That's a rambling way of arriving at my question: How do you think about entropy as a painter?*

JK: I think it does speak of entropy. Maybe it's also a rejection of the notion of entropy. Is entropy anything more than an effect that articulates... what? A disappointment with the impossibility of nothingness? Of permanence?

I don't know but I don't like to think of painting on a canvas as going somewhere so much as doing something.

Each painting does end, though, and working on a single painting forever would make it seem far too important.

This thing of dirty is interesting to me because on one hand I do feel at the moment I first touch a blank canvas that I'm somehow soiling it... but claiming a blank canvas is even worse than ruining one.

The term "purity of void" has more to do with a criticality of the notion of purity than it does with championing the fantasy of the void. It's exposing that there would be this idea of a void or an anti-space and that in the totality of this emptiness, a certain purity would be attained. I see the void as the imaginary friend of the puritanical; some evidence that the desire for the pure is motivated by death drive.

There is a promise of clarity in a glass box and that is probably just an illusion. It's cruel because we know how to yearn for that illusion. It performs a job until something else arrives and that arrival ruins the illusion. This is both a relief, as it cancels this yearning, and a disappointment, as it cancels this yearning.

The death of a false promise is still a loss.

M. L^EBLANC

CP: *I am also interested in this idea of choreography and exposure as I understand it, you apply layers and layers of washes to the canvas and the washes respond to a laid rabbit glue surface, settling permanently in some places as they wash away in others. Is that process where you locate this idea of dance?*

JK: The canvases are sized with several layers of rabbit skin glue and then I paint a single wash of paint on them daily. The colors I use are based on the colors produced in the aquarium; viridian, sap green, alizarin crimson and lemon yellow.

This accretion of the layers of paint negates the color of those preceding and the canvas builds towards an ostensible black. Eventually, a section of the sizing on the canvas wears down and begins to resist saturation and even degrades back towards a lightness. I take either occurrence as a signal to stop. It's an exposure of the painting in that it destroys the paintings potential to be a monochrome. I either leave the canvas like that or I unstretch it and reverse it. The paintings that get reversed seem to have something more like a personality because of the moments where the support has faltered and paint has bled through. But as much as you see the points where the color has come through you are also seeing the places where it has not.

It isn't a terribly complicated process, rather deskilled, if peculiar and specific.

The choreography is knowing what I will do beforehand and remaining more or less consistent to that, intending that the repetition of the behavior avoids a narrative of progress.

I'd hope that the paintings are anachronistic, not in the sense of timelessness but in that they might deny tense.



CP: *One of my favorite pieces in your exhibit at Kavi Gupta is the stack of canvases I loved the way you transform the painting into a sculpture and by stacking them emphasize the painted side or edge a typically marginalized space where accidental drips and stains exist like a dirty closet in a house or dorm room. But you emphasize that side and cover the faces of many paintings. Can you talk a bit about how you decided to stack these works? And did your process of painting change when you anticipated stacking them?*

JK: The sides of these paintings were always attractive to me because they look the same regardless of which side of the painting has been stretched. Last February in Berlin I made a different exhibition with this work that included a coffee table consisting of a stack of square Waterhome paintings elevated on rather feeble legs. The dressing screen in this show made that option seem too much like a literal conversation between painting and furniture but I wanted to retain some kind of focus on what is usually, as you said, a typically marginalized space. There was some playing around with that piece for a while, verticality, horizontality, what a pedestal does or does not do or infer, etc... I felt that it had to be a piece in itself more than just an apparatus to describe the other work. I think it becomes a grammatical elongation of those margins by collapsing the physical space between them. The process of the painting really doesn't ever change but different consequences seem to arise as I continue to make them, whether or not I want them to.

M. L^EBLANC

Don't Panic

An Interview with James Krone

Bonnie Begusch

March 2012

In James Krone's "Waterhome", on view at Kavi Gupta Gallery until April 14, oil paintings hang from a system of support structures that blur the distinctions between front and back, the exposed and the concealed. Flecked with incidental marks and shimmering color gradations that shift between emerald green, deep purple and inky blue, Krone's paintings seem to register the residue of ambiguous deposits, offering subtle and sometimes quirky surprises that waver on the threshold between nothing and excess, the abstract and the concrete.



I love the idea of a “performance of exposure”. Could you elaborate on that a bit?

I think the suggestion is that a definitive exposure of intention is an impossibility. The desire to make a gesture and simultaneously demystify this gesture becomes more about creating a ritual for that desire in itself. How can permission be given to see something without saying “see this thing”? I’m not interested in creating a didactic scenario so the gesture must comprehend itself as a kind of performance of the longing for an impossible clarity. It’s a kind of choreography of intentions.

Can you describe the process you used to make the paintings in “Waterhome”?

Transparently, I paint a single wash of color every day on a stretched canvas sized with rabbit skin glue. The accretion of color negates the preceding layers until there is a stoppage of perceptible change, after approximately 20 to 30 layers. Then I stop painting them and either reverse the canvas or leave it as a kind of ostensible monochrome. It’s pretty much a deskilled, procedural maintenance of accumulation. The blind side, though, through diffusion, begins to mimic abstract painting tropes that are typically referent to aesthetic decision making; compositional variation, etc... The composition is devoid of subjective toiling while still containing some of the pleasures that have come from that sort of painting. This variation is inevitable and I think there is possibility

M. L^EBLANC

for pleasure in the material that doesn't need to be excluded. This side of the paintings also has a mimetic resemblance to the growth of the algae in the fish tank. It's a primordial production process that resembles abstraction. As this happens in the glass cube it also occurs as the paint finds random arrangements through structural weaknesses in the canvas. The canvas becomes a sieve or a screen allowing certain things to pass while not others, in spite of my actions.

The durational dimension seems to play a huge role in the logic of the work, which has been produced over a period of three years so far. How will you know when the project is finished?

Duration is important to me in a relativistic sense. I'm not really interested in resolution and there isn't a designated point in time that might signify arrival or an end point so the fact of three years is merely a fact. The fish tank as a subject generator and the things I've made in response to that refuse a straight timeline. Perhaps the filter will just stop working and that will be all. It isn't about an idea of purity or the authenticity of the object, so maybe if it broke and I felt like I still wanted to keep working on it I'd just buy another fish tank or another filter. The perpetual and mindless production is what is interesting to me, so reacting to a source with a kind of implied duration facilitates this. I'm attracted to procedural habits that refuse to distinguish themselves in a symbolically progressive narrative.

The trellis is a really interesting reference, because it not only brings up issues around the control of entropic growth, but also alludes to a plotting structure or diagram. What was your initial interest in using the trellis as a support?

It was initially a solution for the problem of displaying a two sided painting. The trellises I made for this show resemble stretcher bars, but I also am interested in their functions as decorative framing for obstructing a public gaze and as conductors that direct the growth of vines that would otherwise strangle their neighboring plants. I like that the support is made of torqued squares, diamonds, within a rectilinear frame, formally. There's a pseudo-romantic aspect to them in that they create an illusion of decay while preserving the structural value of architecture. I think of architecture as a kind of a culturally imposed system of physical law placed by civic authorities in order to escape natural law.

Where do you find your source materials- what kinds of things have you been looking at or thinking about while this project has been underway?

I'm interested in the vulnerability of meaning, how one can extrapolate meaning from something devoid of philosophical intention, and how porous or susceptible things are to this. I'm always looking at everything. I'm generally attracted to the things that are lying around me, in my studio or in the general distances I move within; flotsam from my studio, a passage from a book, something I see on ebay... I don't really differentiate context or constitution, whether it's material or cultural, when it comes to an initial attraction. It's a kind of a pantheistic logic so anything is prey. For this show I pretty much just looked at the elements that are in it. It's a very local exhibition in many ways.

I'm intrigued by your recurrent use of the monochrome, both in "Waterhome" and your earlier "Ceremonial Paintings". How do you see your relationship to this particular mode of abstraction?

Monochromatic painting refers to the basic desire to soil what would appear to be an otherwise neutral canvas. I think that painting often comes down to a kind of touch or pressure and I like to slide this thought laterally to the way things apply pressure to one another through proximity or suggestion. A painting can't do much more than to express its desire to be a painting, to color a seemingly neutral plane, but by doing so this exposes a latent set of complications. What had been perceived as neutral, compromises the gesture initially thought to be unobstructed. Somehow this limitation seems to have indefinite potential; latent meaning in drag as neutrality.

In the installation, the trellis structures are set up in a way that recalls stage wings or props; a dressing screen partially blocks the view through the gallery window; actors marks are strewn along the floor as if to direct viewers through preset points of focus. Is a certain theatrical quality important to you in terms of the staging of space?

It kind of reduces the credibility of the aesthetic. I hate art when its credibility is reliant upon opportunistically generalized references, sly or overt, so it's an ethos that announces the costuming. I think it denotes a kind of good faith.

Besides that, I like theatricality, to a certain degree. I, also, like that I dislike theatricality, to a certain degree. It's inevitable. It's a pleasure and somehow it's a concession. It adds a patina that gives people permission to distrust the authority an exhibit might be initially given, to see it as self implicating.

How do you see the role of language in your work, for example in your choice of titles?

The language I choose is always bound to the work. Sometimes the title might indicate the behavior that produced the work or an attitude that preceded the behavior. Sometimes the work indicates the title and, occasionally, the title is meant to undermine the work. I never want to use language to mystify things but sometimes the suggestion of simplicity, when something cannot be simple,

M. L^EBLANC

ends up working as a lubricant for a false sense of communion. Titles locate the mental relationship of an object in space and time and are as formally relevant to me as any other component of a work.

“Illegible Deposit” takes up some of the motifs you’ve explored visually, such as porousness and reiteration, and translates them into speech. What was it like making this piece- was it your first foray into working with sound?

Some of that text has a logic similar to my visual work. I guess I believe that a gesture announces the coming of another gesture and this accumulation of layers begins to frame a taxonomy and a palimpsest, simultaneously. This logic can be dubious but then even a suspicion becomes a gesture that creates an echo and so on. Most of the work I do, regardless of medium, has to do with comprehending a perpetual state of becoming.

Illegible Deposit is an awkward piece. I think it’s about mediation and exhaustion. It was originally written as the text for a performance I did somewhat recently. I read the piece twice while a mime I had hired walked around the crowd, trying to perform a set of tasks I’d described that were impossible to perform within the space. Eventually the mime gave up and just stood there while I finished reading the piece. Recorded as a sound piece, the sculptural element of it seems to be more prevalent.

ARTSLANT

TRICKLE DOWN ERGONOMICS

JAMES KRONE

Kavi Gupta Gallery

835 West Washington, 60607 Chicago, IL, US

October 23, 2010 - December 4, 2010

PATTERN & REPRESENTATION

BY ERIK WENZEL

Remember that oft-quoted line from Matisse about wanting his paintings to be like comfortable armchairs? That quotation is a perfect example of a meme, an idea whose viability is measured not by its content but by its capacity to self-perpetuate and mutate or evolve. Like so many historical statements, [this one has become unmoored from its original context](#), and even its original wording as I have purposely done above. When most people cite it, they are really only citing the general idea, not the quotation itself. Matisse wanted you to feel like you are sitting in a comfortable easy chair when you look at his paintings—that is what the statement has become. And depending on whose side you're on, it's either damning proof that Matisse was just a decorative painter of prettiness or a strong argument for making pleasant art. And just as this phenomenon of words being repeated, altered and re-authored exists, there are always historians to come along to “set things straight,” further contributing to the statement's de-authorship. In any case, the idea of a painting being a comfortable armchair is just as ubiquitous as painting being dead, a statement that is simultaneously stable and in flux.

The quote comes up a lot. And it definitely occurred to me while looking at James Krone's installation “Trickle Down Ergonomics” at Kavi Gupta Gallery. The works on view are repeated vignettes selected from various series the artist has been focusing on. There are the “Chair Paintings,” the ostensibly black monochrome “Ceremonial Paintings,” the “Ashtrays” and one example of his “Sigil” paintings.

The *Chair Paintings* (2010) are a series of four paintings based on the flower print cushions of white plastic-coated wire patio chairs from the artist's studio. In the exhibition, the resultant paintings are paired with their corresponding chairs. Looking from the paintings to the chairs, and back again, I thought of that Matisse quote, especially with Chair Painting I & II. Finding historical connections has become a reflex rather than a conscious act. Looking back to the painting, with its rich and almost neon hues opaquely laid over muddy grayed out washes, and then returning to the muted dullness of the same image on the chair's padding, I thought: these paintings are much more comfortable than those chairs...

The paintings are fresh and ripe, but enclose the dinginess of the padding they draw from. The chairs look awful. Perhaps it's their uninviting quality under stark fluorescent lights or their location in a pristine gallery, but it never occurred to me to sit in them. The chairs are also anthropomorphized: they are facing the paintings, as if looking at them; they are not suggesting you sit on them to look at the paintings. They seem sad, as though they are gazing at themselves in the mirror, maybe their younger self even. Their profane selves in the real world are made beautiful through portrait painting, a sort of reverse of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, sublimated through furniture.

While all these connections are being made, the paintings are still there as solid works of art in and of themselves. Aside from reaching out into “real life” in dialogue with the chairs, there is a lot going on within them. I wonder if in some ways presenting this literal relationship between artwork and source material detracts from the paintings themselves. It can be a little gimmicky. But there is something brazen and knowing about the arrangement. Rather than coming off as pleased in their own cleverness, the arrangement seems rather blunt and up front—here are paintings and the chairs that inspired them. Having the chairs present encourages the viewer to enter at the macro level, comparing the painting as a singular object to the chair, rather than examining all the things going on in the painting.

Within each Chair Painting, and between them, there is a lot of substantive content in regards to patterning and repetition. There is the manner in which Krone has made four separate and complete paintings out of this banal kitsch. They are not precise deadpan

M. L^EBLANC

representations of their patterned fabric cousins. They have that source embedded within them, but they are also free painterly paintings, not chained to slavishly reproducing the appearance of the source. In a way, they are the same painting four times, since the pattern from the fabric is the same. The only difference, which makes all the difference, is that the patterning never lines up the same way—it shifts. This subtle inconsistency makes for a notably different composition each time around.

Repetition that shows its seams could be the guiding principle of the installation, as variously placed throughout the gallery along with the Chair Paintings are other works that deal with repetition and reiteration in their own ways. In the *Ceremonial Painting I – III* (2010, example seen above), somewhat black paintings are made up of several layers of off-register blue squares. With each layered square the area gets closer to black and glossier. They are almost impossible to see straight on, and are only activated as you walk past them, watching them shimmer as each layer catches the light.

The ashtrays, *Ashtray I – V* (2010, seen at left), are birch branches that have been crudely made to stand upright by casting concrete and aluminum foil around their bases. Sculpturally they resemble totems or stubbed out cigarettes but they are also functioning ashtrays; just barely. The ends of the branches have been carved out and sand placed in the crater. But for such a large apparatus, an area smaller than a pop can in diameter is devoted to its actual utility. The other factor rendering them useless is their situation in a gallery in a non-smoking building. When shown in L.A., they were used appropriately. Krone remarked how they lose their preciousness when used. There is something about crossing that uncanny valley between viewer and object that a stark gallery space sets up. Indeed this is the case with the chairs as well.

When I met James this summer in Berlin, we hung out in his apartment studio sitting in those very chairs talking and they seemed more than adequate. Seeing them in the gallery, they felt alien, foreign and off limits. Presented in this manner they become self-conscious. “I can’t believe we sat in those!” I thought. Not that they are particularly disgusting, just that they seem so different and familiar at the same time. It’s this “difference beyond difference” that Boris Groys talks about in his essay “On the New” when discussing the nature of collecting and presenting everyday objects in an art environment. Art allows us to contemplate things in a way might not otherwise be able to or even consider, but in order to do that, occasionally it must also create a distance.

-Erik Wenzel, Senior ArtSlant Staff Writer

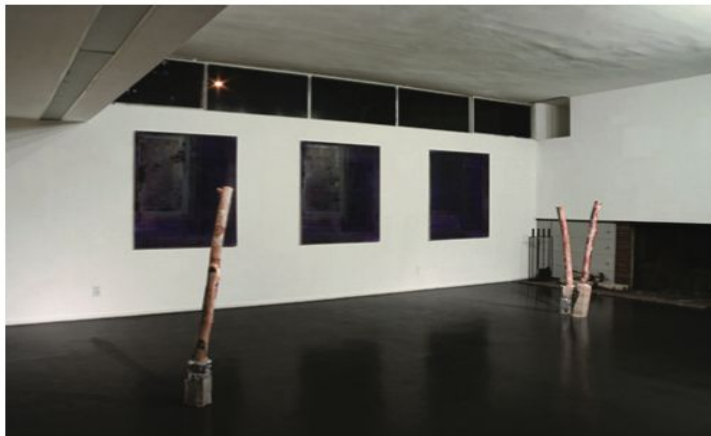


Chairs (2 of 4) 2010 Found chairs and Oil on canvas primed with rabbit skin glue 150 x 75 cm (each)

ARTFORUM

James Krone

March 2010
By Cassie Wu



View of "James Krone," 2010.

James Krone

The Wilderness Is the Witches Leash

COUNTRY CLUB PROJECTS

805 South Genesee Avenue, at the Rudolf Schindler Buck House

February 13–April 3, 2010

Walking into James Krone's latest exhibition, "The Wilderness Is the Witches Leash," is like stepping onto a lovingly crafted and sincere movie set, however paradoxical that may sound. Much of the feeling derives initially from the domestic architecture of Country Club Projects, which operates out of Rudolf Schindler's 1934 Buck House. Krone's paintings hang throughout the furnished home and propel viewers to meander through the space—from living room to dining room to bedroom and back—while inviting fantasies of dinner parties and backyard soirees, cigarette and highball in hand. Krone riffs on this dream by placing his *Ashtray Watchtowers*, 2010—vertical limblike sculptures formed from the branches of a birch tree—in front of his not-quite-monochrome paintings on the wall. Filled with sand at top, the *Ashtray Watchtowers* are functional ashtrays, and viewers are invited to light their own smoke, contemplate the canvases between drags, and extinguish the butt in one of the sculptures.

At once props and actors, Krone's works force the smoker's disinterested gaze onto the legacies of modernist art history. In his paintings, Krone is neither antagonistic nor dismissive toward the monochrome, yet he challenges Greenbergian atness by painting thin, rectangular layers of deep shades of violet and indigo directly on unprimed canvas sized with rabbit-skin glue. The result is a surface that appears contradictory: Certain areas are soaked with pigment and threaten to collapse into a black hole, while other sections are hard and reflective, refusing access to the canvas beneath. As a result, Krone's investigation of modernist strategies is less concerned with finding new solutions to old dilemmas than it is about exploring the hidden possibilities of previously solved problems, thus setting the stage for a novel adaptation of a midcentury classic.

James Krone

The Wilderness Is the Witches Leash

COUNTRY CLUB PROJECTS

805 South Genesee Avenue, at the Rudolf Schindler Buck House

February 13–April 3, 2010

LOS ANGELES, CA - Country Club presents a new body of work by James Krone. "The Wilderness is the Witches Leash" features new sculptures and paintings from this Berlin-based artist.

The significance of the black monochrome painting to the narrative of modernism means that anybody making one now is, to some extent, qualifying an existing sign. It is the monolithic image of the 20th Century Avant-garde. James Krone's black paintings are not strictly black monochromes but a complex layering of violet, red and blue, which use color to comment on the received idea of the black painting. Imagine the history as a ground over which Krone rewrites.

Art & Language's Secret Painting, 1967-68, consists of two square canvases next to each other, one all black, the other all white but with a sentence printed on it announcing that which is unknowable in the content of the black canvas. It might be the first postmodern artwork, the text a conceptualist tool qualifying the inherited pretensions of the Black Square. Krone's black paintings unite the transcendental image with the disillusioned postmodern commentary. Their serial format comprehends the process of reproduction, which is one essential template for art's commodification. The paintings are simultaneously unique and reproduced, modernist and postmodernist, nostalgic and futuristic, archly serious and tongue-in-cheek.

Krone's paintings are shadowed by a range of definitive modernist strategies. That they overlap in his paintings is a sign of the distance the series keeps from its antecedents. There is Frank Stella's workaday application of paint in stripes of a regular modulated width, avoiding expressionistic facture. There is the generic modernist hang of a sequence of equal-sized rectangles. There are the formalistic geometries of Krone's composition that derive, self-reflexively, from the shape of the support. There is the minimalistic repetition of that composition which implicitly denies invention and originality. These strategies carry over something of the categorical aura of their sources, the sense that each originally presented itself as the only possible solution to a problem. Krone's transformation is to blend them all simultaneously into structures that are non-hierarchical.

Black paintings are always driving towards the ultimate darkness, the undifferentiated surface; the total black that brooks no contradictions and absorbs all light. A plane that is both all opaque and all transparent. They speak a language of binaries and polarities. Krone's black paintings are skeletons of that ultimate all-over black plane, as Brice Marden described his later gestural paintings as the skeletons of his earlier monochromes. They diagrammatically project a process which would produce the all-over black painting if it were followed to its logical extreme, but they hold off and allow the results to function as questioning projections of the potentiality of an absolute statement.

Mark Prince

Notes on Looking

From the Fellows of Contemporary Art

By Geoff Tuck
February 18, 2010

In the late 1990's when David and I first started really looking at art in LA I was fascinated with monochrome painting. The luscious surfaces; beautiful and sometimes problematic colors; singleness of mind brought to bear in completing a work with such minimal affect by spending weeks or months doing it; all this captivated me. As is often the case with first loves, the more I saw and the longer I looked I became dissatisfied with the limited possibilities in these paintings.

James Krone, in his show *The Wilderness is the Witches Leash* at Country Club confronts those limitations head on and completely blows them away. Krone's paintings are relatively monochromatic purple canvases that don't speak to me of long, labored effort or of narrowing down choices. They look like chronicles of their making and, dare I say, like photo-exposures of the artist's state of mind while painting. I feel involved, as I look, in the meditative nature of Krone's act: quickly, deliberately and with as few brushstrokes as possible marking out a rectangular space in the canvas, encouraging the red and blue to show alongside the purple and the purple to sometimes become black.

A louche modernist, that's James Krone in this show.



James Krone, *Ceremonial Painting—Make us think. Make us think slow*, 2009-2010 Oil on canvas.
[Link to Country Club.](#)

artUS

James Krone

September 2008

By Christopher Russell



Jodie Wet, 2008

Oil on Canvas

33 x 28 inches

Circus Gallery, Los Angeles CA February 23 * March 29, 2008

James Krone's first solo show in Los Angeles, "In Lieu of a Science of Memory," seems to add another layer to the historical back-and-forth between painting and photography. Krone uses painting as a documentary medium. In this instance, painting's authority is equal to the beleaguered history of photography's truth claim. Krone's images have the abstract qualities of Bay Area Figuration, yet their subjects are recognizable faces and cultural icons. Krone takes inspiration from Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel's renowned *Evidence* (1977), which mined police and other official photographic archives with surreal and often absurd results. In a similar fashion, the various subjects Krone culls together point to overlapping schemes of political intrigue. Like Sultan and Mandel, Krone's work tends toward the illogical, but also leaves us with such bittersweet imponderables as whether today's more pressing social and political issues could have been avoided had Ronald Reagan's assassin hit his mark.

There is a semblance of nostalgia in Krone's images of Jody Foster, Ronald Reagan, Warhol, and redacted White House documents, and yet the sum of these images amounts to more than a 1980s-style pastiche. In the gallery, a circuitous narrative develops around John Hinckley's 1981 assassination attempt, fueled by his obsession with Jody Foster. Concerning the theme of assassination, Warhol--represented here by obvious yet low-fidelity appropriations of his flower paintings--is linked to Reagan through Valerie Solon's 1968 attempt on the artist's life. Warhol, as art commodity par excellence, draws associations with the 1980s art bubble and the triumph of conspicuous consumption typified by the New Republicans catalyzed around Reaganomics, while simultaneously pointing to CIA support of Ab-Ex painters. Before one stops to consider what would have happened had either Warhol or Reagan actually died from their shootings, enormous paintings of pseudo-official documents begin to cloud possible solutions, drawing on ideas of government conspiracy, the inscrutability of widely impacting events, and the absurdity of institutional doublespeak.

To this end, Krone's show includes doubly coded works that scramble the assumed meanings crisscrossing the main subjects under investigation, among them *Black Sucker (Sleep)* (all work 2008), a painting of a censored National Security Council document, and the sculpture *Good Shooter's Chair*, a plastic-covered chair standing in four empty Kleenex tissue boxes. Krone's documentary handiwork does something that cannot be done with ordinary photography. Krone's *Jodie Wet* painting, for instance, is overshadowed by ominous contextual concerns, superimposing a rape fantasy on her otherwise youthful innocence. The same kind of confusion and contamination also spills over into the treatments of Reagan and Warhol. The kitschy *Reagan Mask* vividly marks the origin of that political spiral which eventually led to Abu Ghraib, and *Museum Calendar Vapor* points to more perverse aspects of Warhol's flowery chef d'oeuvre. Krone courts the unfashionable idea of active, Romantic imagination, ultimately taking us beyond mainstream news into paranoid fantasies about what the CIA has on Jody Foster, the truth of Hinckley's "insanity," and Warhol's role in a government-led consumerist conspiracy.

Unlike many younger artists today who appear reluctant to tackle political issues head-on, Krone's "In Lieu of a Science of Memory" is truly subversive. Through a kind of historical about-face, the current preference for Lockean, passive imagination over transformative operations of the mind upon external objects has only led to a mere recording of received impressions, whether as safely formal or stridently academic work. Krone's show is different in that it uses painting to hijack a photographic truism while slowly maneuvering into the darker corners of contemporary imagination.