

Divorces Have Been Filed for Lesser Reasons

Christoph Matthes

23 March – 22 April 2023

The integrity of these paintings results from Christoph Matthes's adaptive sensibility. Experimentation with process was the precursor to the compositions, making way for new figure-ground relationships, and their emergent tensions. Intrafamilial frictions and malaise are subjects that Matthes consistently returns to. In dealing with the disaffection of middle-class Germany, cars and domestic interiors reappear out of this interest in a suburbanism constantly verging on the rural. Matthes contends that the muscle cars and trucks are most recognizable as representative of a certain strain of masculinity. He pays homage to his own coming of age in a military family, with the image of a little tank recurring across two paintings on view.

Matthes initiated this body of work with drawings on paper, which were executed using a ballpoint pen then diluted using a shellac and alcohol mixture. He discovered the potential in this mode, and went on to apply it to canvas. This produces a distancing effect between viewer and object, as the film between foreground and background results in an ominous haze. He presents this process uninterrupted in not flawless but gorgeous, where he's forgone the addition of a vivid foreground in favor of the entombed spatter of materials that consistently make up his backgrounds.

The stage is set in an accumulation of gestures and chemical steps, which are constantly remixed by Matthes as he moves from painting to painting. He describes the construction of *Fish*, in particular, as it began with a ballpoint pen drawing on raw canvas, which was then stretched and primed with rabbit skin glue. This traditional priming technique serves as a membrane in this case, as it creates a film of protection over the illustration. After this, Matthes applied alcohol to the surface and painted pigmented rabbit skin glue around the pen lines, then directly on top of them. He washed the background color out with a thin layer of white, creating an appearance akin to that of an overworn, overwashed T-shirt. This was all sealed with an acrylic emulsion and an alcohol-based ink, afterwards Matthes pursued the foregrounded composition of fighter fish.

Consistent pale pink color fields reflect the artist's consideration of virtuous color relationships. The eye and mind combat over the transparency of pink, never really clarifying whether its disposition is opaque or translucent. The pale background of *Schlüsselkinder* ("Latchkey children"), in particular, creates the impression of viewing an outside world from inside the aquarium tank. While the foregrounds are largely populated by specified forms, Matthes doesn't move with any predetermination. The addition of the concrete image on top of this washed out background is a disruptive mode, but not a destructive one. Like selecting the best word for a sentence, things connect by an interplay of logic and happenstance.

Matthes's paintings emerge in layers and entangled narratives. He embraces a metaphorical status as the unwanted child of Louise Bourgeois and Martin Kippenberger. Setting out with the sensitivity, intimacy, and brutality of the former while dutifully employing Kippy's humor. The rigor of Matthes's process coalesces with the apparent levity of his subjects, igniting a disquietude that compels the viewer to marinate in his kinetics. Having engaged with the medium for over a decade, he consistently restruct.