

Markus Weggenmann
«Im Hasenbart»

Several commentators have taken note of a central aspect of Markus Weggenmann's glossy paintings: that is, the simultaneous presence of intimacy and distance, and of opulence and cool reduction. By way of their intense density of colors and shapes, the works seduce the beholder, yet remain distant, as if hiding behind the perfect reflection of their surfaces. The encounter of these opposites leaves behind a latent feeling of being overwhelmed: This is an additional aspect of Weggenmann's painting that is further amplified by the large formats typical of the artist's work. His most recent group of works takes up where these cycles left off: «Im Hasenbart», 21 paintings in a surprisingly small format. He presents them in his solo show at Galerie Mark Müller in an almost classical hanging, so that the paintings, highly heterogeneous in terms of their color, yet linked by their identical format and character as objects, combine to form a kind of illustrated story. But in contrast to Weggenmann's previous work, the format here demands that the beholder approaches the works closely. In terms of the overall exhibition, this results in the beholder moving from one painting to the next. It is impossible to keep from "reading" the motifs: the series of these small visual works implies a kind of freely interpretable narrative that unavoidably allows for reading figures and stories into the semi-abstract shapes and compositions. As it were, Weggenmann uses this narrative element as a means against the works' supposed lack of reference and their resulting visual impact. On the level of reception, the formal-aesthetic perception is thus joined by a more goal-oriented take on the images that is concerned with correspondences and content between and within the images, that is, also counters the aforementioned feeling of being overwhelmed.

Yet the new works also operate more directly in the sense that they immediately convey the original painterly gesture which in Markus Weggenmann's work is subjected to a multiple process of abstraction, or, as Christoph Schreier calls it, a "process of sublimation." The distemper drafts on paper, which emerge in large numbers and great continuity in the studio, describe the "site" of the painting. By the way of their subsequent selection, digital treatment, their execution in large formats, and their technical production by a professional varnisher, they then undergo a series of displacements. Nevertheless, since the «Hasenbart» format corresponds almost one to one with the original drafts, the most recent works undermine the central procedure of the blow up, thus shortening the path from the original design to the final image. Markus Weggenmann's zestful painterly gesture—spontaneous, personal, direct, and intuitive—is easily recognizable, and holds together these compositions that are so highly divergent in terms of colors and motifs. In that its relation to the actual, physical act of painting is less modified without the blow-up, the brushstroke seems much more direct and authentic than in the previous large formats.

As a supplement, Markus Weggenmann also presents in this exhibition one of his few sculptural works. This ceramic sculpture, which was finished using the same technique as the varnished paintings, seems as if three of the painterly movements described above had taken on a life of their own. As it were stepping out of the foundation of the painting, they form up one after another, which invites the beholder to move towards and around the work. The object group made of clay serves as a spatial interpretation of Markus Weggenmann's typical gesture, the spontaneity and tantalizing imperfection, which is also convincingly conveyed in this formation.

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With this work group, Markus Weggenmann invites us for once to come closer—in a literal and metaphorical sense, closer to his painting, which at its core is highly personal; paintings, about which he says that they emerge from encounters with colors and shapes. Encounters are also what hold the individual works of the series together. Designs from various times and contexts here appear all in the same formal cloak, as visual components of a story that can be retold time and again in new ways.