Dave Bopp
«Give Death A Better Name»

March 10–April 14, 2018

With the exhibition Give Death A Better Name, Dave Bopp (b. in Basel in 1988) is celebrating two premieres: not only is the show his first at Galerie Mark Müller, but it is also his first solo exhibition in Switzerland. After growing up in Bülach, the young Swiss artist moved to Stuttgart in 2010, where he has been studying painting at the Akademie der bildenden Künste. Give Death a Better Name takes a look backward and a look forward: the show combines five current works that were all created using a technique that represents a logical development of Bopp's work from the past. In this way, he not only casts a new light on previous works, but also shows new possibilities of his painting.

The exhibition title Give Death a Better Name combines two essential qualities of Bopp's work: painterly earnestness and an artistic aplomb. Names are images that are used to conquer the emptiness that death entails. Giving death a name and naming the silence is the basic thought behind painterly struggle against the empty canvas. The ironic turn of wanting to give it a better name, to exit the struggle and enter the game, can be read as an ironic artistic statement and as a metaphor for painting. The gap, that is not the unused surface. The gap is the stage before the game. It's not about replacing it, but about suspending it in play. Painting is wherever painting takes place. The picture is whatever remains. This is why Bopp's works are strictly speaking not products of painterly actions, but their aggregation.

It is worth taking a closer look at Bopp's approach. He begins with a rectangular form in the shape of an untreated aluminum composite panel placed horizontally on the studio floor. In a first step, it is completely coated in acrylic polymer resin lacquer, filled in, covered. The result is photographed and edited in a digital design program. While Bopp until recently did this work by mouse click, the forms are now inserted using digital drawing on a tablet: they are distorted, shredded, or multiplied. In brief: he engages in wild experimentation, resulting in shapes, surfaces, and structures that are then cut using a cutting plotter on adhesive foil and pasted on the painting aluminum plates. Now, the work continues on the floor of the studio, and the next layer of color is applied, painted, poured or sprayed. The result are zones of color that overlap, run into one another, rub against one another, and when they solidify result in almost virtual effects. This is followed by the next photograph and the process continues: ultimately, ten, twenty or more layers lie on top of one another.

The image that results is less a collage, and more a palimpsest. It preserves the entire process like archaeological sediment: it allows it to become transparent in some places, while in other places it is entirely veiled. In this way, a hybrid painting emerges that is less clear than analogue, nor should it be considered digital. By way of the close combination of electronic and analogous steps in the process, and the uncontrollable coincidences that take place along the way, resulting from the idiosyncratic mode of applying paint, results in a mixed form where the digital and the analogue question themselves: is the act of electronic painting less painterly than the analogue painting, although composition for the latter emerges in the former? And is analogous painting not itself in a sense digital when with it spaces, levels, and effects are generated, overlapped, distorted, or deleted? Can the work steps be separated from one another when they complete one another?

Bopp's painting, in essence, is not abstract, but quite concrete. The color surfaces, objects and shapes that fill the paintings are not abstractions of figurative motifs, but self-referential. They can thus be read as surfaces, forms, and colors, not in the Platonic sense as pure things but quite realistically as hybrid mixed beings, which, depending on the way we see them, are legible as physical color, color spaces, or traces of the work process. Give Death a Better Name expands

these dimensions and explores new possibilities of visual composition. While the two works *Baldachin* and *Space Junk* appear as conglomerates of trellis shapes, in *Canyon* we see a transition to reduced accentuations, which finally culminates in clearly outlined   pictorial segments *Psychopomper* and *Blue Moon*. In *Baldachin* and *Space Junk,* there is a space at the foreground that results from the paint overlaps: in the one case, a leafy jungle of color with a clear center of gravity, in the other a space of palpable weightlessness, in which fleeting strips of color flirt with one another noncommittally, float, and fluidly overlap. In contrast*,* in *Psychopomper* a hard, earth-green shadow juts forth from the cloudy, lemon-colored surroundings, that appropriates the visual space just as it   snuggles up against it. *Blue Moon* then links the lower spotted layers of paint with the upper layer, a deep blue, voluminous sphere, since the intermediate stripe layer appears like an abstract background against which almost figurative color beings share the surface.

By intersecting various forms of composition in the exhibition space, the show ultimately also examines the intervening process between them. But not as a continuous, linear development from one form of composition to the next, but as variations that contrast mutually and thus comment on one another. In this way, not only is the painting playful, but also the images themselves.

Philipp Spillmann