



Fabian Treiber
«Painting the Night Unreal»
7.11. - 19.12.2020

“When we look at the full moon through the window at night, we all find ourselves in distinctive places, in different rooms and in various situations, but we all share the same moon no matter where we are looking from.”

In “Painting the Night Unreal,” Fabian Treiber presents his second solo show at Galerie Mark Müller. The artist, who was born in Ludwigsburg in 1986 and was trained at Stuttgart’s Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, has dedicated himself formally speaking to the subject of the interior in his paintings, using it to question subjective projections and our perception of reality.

The title of the exhibition, which occurred to Treiber while working on these pieces in the form of a fragment, pretends to be narrative in nature, but at the same time proves strangely impenetrable. The contradictory element, initially no more than an inkling, makes its way diffusely towards consciousness and thus allows access to Treiber’s works.

What does this “night” look like that Treiber wants to paint “unreal” for us? Is the sky clear and full of stars or is it cloudy? “I’m not painting a concrete night, but simply ‘night.’ What does ‘night’ really mean? How do I paint the feeling that the nighttime triggers or is inherent in it?” Treiber explains. Night in his works is rather a prototype, a distillation of all nights and the emotions that they trigger. Night presents itself to viewers not by way of pure depictions of the sky, but here and there with motivic and typological references, as in the case of the burning candle in *Five Days On*. But it primarily penetrates the paintings as seen through windows, as in *Nightlife 2* or *Nightvision*.

The windows, doors, and openings in Treiber’s works expand the pictures, providing them additional space, but above all for speculation, since that space remains impenetrable and inaccessible to the beholders. Despite the representation of spatiality that all Treiber’s works share, he is not committed to realistic perspective. So Treiber’s images seem artificial and strangely flat, due not least to his way of working. Beginning with the untreated canvas, he proceeds slowly, starting off by applying glazed surfaces of paint, then adding lines that overlap to arrive at shapes and finally the objects that “inhabit” his pictures. This takes place in countless thin layers, sometimes resulting in very pastose concretions. His point of departure is always a particular timbre of color. His motifs, his spaces, in contrast, grow during the process of painting, they do not refer to actual situations, but feed on things remembered and speculations.

But what exactly is it that makes Treiber’s paintings of the nights “unreal,” if his paintings are per se not committed to reality? The artist insists that “unreal” is not necessarily the same thing as “not real.” This polarization, in his eyes, is an oversimplification. What indeed is “real” at all when it comes to paintings? In fact, only the material is real, and yet all the same we see and experience various things while viewing a painting, in a certain sense abstractly and thus “unreal.” “I am interested in the memories and experiences with which we encounter the paintings and that we draw directly from our reality,” as the artist puts it. Central to him is always the question of how reality can be mapped.



“We do not see what we see, but what we are,” Fernando Pessoa writes in his *Book of Unrest*. Do we not see reality, but what we remember and what we feel? Do we see or remember the same night? Or the same blue? By shifting and balancing on this line of demarcation, Treiber advances a condition that first makes the visualization of these feelings possible and thus assigns the painting a serious role as our vis-à-vis. Especially when paintings are viewed in a purely motivic way, and what can be seen is compared with what is known, this can result in a misunderstanding. Art creates its own rules, fabricates its own reality and in so doing can stretch beyond the reality we know, complementing it or contrasting against it. Treiber derives from this a legitimation to make decisions in his paintings formally and not narratively. In so doing, he provokes a conscious break, thus declaring what is supposedly false as the very quality of painting, with the effect that his works somehow might seem not quite right, but are just right.

Frederike Ebert, Cologne, October 2020