



**Fabian Treiber «Bilder»
March 14 - May 9, 2026**

**I show pictures.
I ask what pictures are.
I do not answer, I paint it.**

– Fabian Treiber

**An image is an offer for the projection of absence. It does not only show what is there;
it structures what is missing.**

– Luc Tuymans

What Are Pictures?

When asked about the essence of a good picture, Luc Tuymans is said to have answered that painting operates by way of omission. A good picture should never reveal everything; the decisive aspect is what is not painted. Freely paraphrasing Tuymans, a good picture contains a gap, a zone that is activated and filled by the viewers. But what happens when the artist himself is already confronted with a gap like this at the very start? When the picture emerges from a lack, a gap that is initially filled, to then, over the course of painting, be slowly reopened in a controlled fashion? This is the point of departure for Fabian Treiber's latest works. His visual world feeds, among other things, on reproductions of the backgrounds of animated films, interiors, landscapes, still-lives, that once served merely as backdrops. Treiber frees these visual spaces from their secondary role and transfers them to their very own painterly arrangement. But even as protagonists, they refuse narrative clarity. Their narrative potential remains suspended. Not the motif is central, but what color, structure, surface, and space release emotionally and atmospherically. Frequently, a shade of color forms the foundation. This develops over the course of the painting process into shapes that refer not so much to concrete places or objects, but rather evoke states, memories, projections, moods.

In this way, visual spaces emerge that move between found motif and painterly invention and elude clear legibility. Flattened perspectives, condensed spatial sequences, and abrupt visual cuts generate a state between proximity and distance, familiarity and foreignness, meaning and disturbance. The motifs seem less like places, and more like fragile states where vision, memory, and sensation are impossible to distinguish from one another. Pictures here are not copies of reality, but autonomous spaces. They condense atmospheres and make something visible that has no stable location outside the picture, neither in space nor in time. Treiber's painterly practice thus focuses on a precise study of the conditions under which pictures emerge and become effective. Gesture and construction, spontaneity and a calculated visual mechanics enter into a tense relationship. Painting here seems to be not mere representation, but a process of



assemblage, overlapping, and shifting: an act where seeing remains unstable and meaning has to be renegotiated continuously. Fabian Treiber thus does not tell stories. He tells of pictures, and of painting itself.

What Are Pictures?

Borrowing from Leon Battista Alberti's famous metaphor of painting as an open window, Fabian Treiber's paintings do not open as windows to the world, but become the experimental surface for painting itself. The view, a central motif in Treiber's work, is revealed from the beginning as a construction, in which it stages itself as a gestural act, as completed painting. Fabian Treiber's series *Bilder* (Pictures) has been emerging since the start of 2025, small format paintings that, despite their various techniques and motifs, have the character of a painterly jam session. It is not about a previously conceived, closed work, but spontaneous reacting, exploring, opening oneself up, and the constant development of ideas in the process.

Damn Places, a series of small format paintings, represent the essence of recent years of his artistic practice. The fragmentary selections of background elements or enlarged details become small proscenia that move between image, object, and memory fragment. These small-format works fold the large pictorial spaces together, as it were. What seems like an open stage-like setting on the larger canvases appears here as a condensed stage of vision, as a place where gesture, material, and memory are newly arranged in a tight space. Revealing and concealing, surface and depth, presence and absence fold here in the narrowest of spaces. These works are, however, not sketches or preliminary studies for large-format works. Instead, independent assertions of motif and painting are formulated in these paintings. Here, improvisation becomes visible as a method. The printouts serve as structural points of departure, as supports for a preexisting visual logic that is transformed in the painting process. Between found structure, generalized motifs, mimetic reference, and painterly invention, these spaces elude any narrative clarity. Planned as a series, the paintings in the series *Bilder* vary certain forms and color spaces, but remain heterogenous in their execution. They oscillate between an offer and a refusal: sometimes a wide view towards the horizon of an undefined ocean opens, sometimes bars of color condense over one another to form nearly concrete visual fields. The "bleeding" of the papers when mounted on the support generates monochromatic zones of painterly autonomy; here, chance and control intersect with one another.

Gestural traces—oil, chalk, overpainting—combine with disturbances in the print. They do not emerge as mere layering, but as targeted interventions, as formal and textural contrasts, as a physical display of painting as a medium that can be experienced. In these works, Treiber condenses his questions to intimate dimensions. Memory plays a central role here, not as nostalgic reconstruction, but as an unstable state between knowledge, suspicion, recognition, and loss. The pictures follow a logic of *déjà-vu*: they evoke familiarity without origins. While in earlier series living space and landscape combined in hybrid visual spaces—Treiber himself referred to a painterly *cadavre exquis*—in these latest large-format works, interiors and exteriors penetrate one



another in another way. Urban landscapes appear as reflections in the interior, views outside become consciously constructed pictorial events. They are less windows onto the world than assertions about perception.

What Are Pictures?

Thinking takes place in doing, this is a central finding from *The Craftsman* by Richard Sennett. And form emerges in dialogue with the material, in the resistance of the surface. In Treiber, glazed surfaces, lines, applications, and fissures condense to forms that evoke figuration without imitating it. Paint appears as a physical presence. One question that Treiber investigates is: how can material inform? For Fabian Treiber, paint is never just a device, but an agent. It flows, thins, congeals, collides with hard edges. Marked areas, abrupt breaks, and provisional transitions reveal that this painting is well aware of its own artificiality. It trusts the atmosphere without falling for it. Beauty does not appear as a promise, but as a fragile moment that can tip over at any time. The attraction of his paintings emerges together with the material and surface: blurred structures, gestural statements, blotches as confident assertions between an offer and refusal. "Craftsmanship takes place," as Treiber puts it.

Several of the new works were created on supports that the artist never used before, on coarse burlap or portrait linen, variously structured linen fabrics, instead of the classical, finely-meshed nettle canvas that Treiber otherwise uses. While the application of paint to nettle seems more controlled and allows delicate transitions more easily, the burlap brings in a decisive, almost rural texture. Its greater absorbability lets the paint sink in, fray, break out and at the same time vehemently resists clean representation when hatching is done with oil sticks. The visible structure is consciously arranged and becomes a productive part of the painting. In earlier series, props, plants, and everyday things occupied his visual spaces: trees, suns and moons, faucets, hands, candles, shoes. But they served less as symbols and more as compositional points to fixate on, around which various painterly languages were organized. Airbrushed haze, cartoon-like lines, veiled color fields and collaged fragments still coexist, but without the claim to a seamless illusion. Treiber allows for atmospheres, but mistrusts them at the same time. Beauty remains ruptured, covered with sutures, cuts, and provisional transitions. Revealing and concealing become gestures equal in status: presence and absence appear as two parameters of the same painterly movement.

What Are Pictures?

For Fabian Treiber, reality in painting is not a fixed standard, but an intersubjective agreement. His paintings are not bound to a central perspective; every deviation seems productive as a moment of misunderstanding. The expectations and experiences of the beholder, in which perception and memory overlap, are decisive. His pictures move on a threshold where imaginative projections emerge and familiar visual arrangements are transferred to initially alien-seeming constellations. The supposedly "wrong" appearance of his spaces and perspectives is consciously intended: it



frees painting from a purely mimetic claim and shows it to be an autonomous counterpart that struggles with our expectations. Painting, for Treiber, is not the illustration of stories, but an authority that makes atmospheres, insecurities, and sensations visible. Paintings seem less invented, but rather found, and therefore they challenge us to readjust our conception and memory of reality. They do not reconstruct what has passed, but realize what is no longer present. Treiber's *Bilder* demonstrate that landscape, space, and memory are not fixed. They are variable, psychologically charged, always in a state of becoming, precarious and vague. Seeing becomes an act, painting becomes an attitude, and remembering something that does not need to be preserved, but has to be reassembled with every look. We remain in Fabian Treiber's pictures. Not because we understand them, but because they take us in. They are an offer and an invitation. His painting emphasizes that pictures not only show, but are made: layers of memory, material, and gesture. In them, perception is always a variable form.

In the end, pictures, for Fabian Treiber, are always a reflection on the medium itself. They are gestures that remain open, spaces that shift, questions that do not allow a conclusive answer. Painting remains an eternal perhaps, and therein lies its strength.

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