

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

Press release
October 2019

Michael Williams
New Paintings

October 12 to December 21, 2019
Opening on Friday, October 11, 6 to 8 pm
Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to announce the gallery's third solo exhibition with Los Angeles-based artist Michael Williams.

In his exhibition, Williams shows several new paintings that further develop his oeuvre. Half of the works are large-scale inkjet paintings depicting portraits derived from photographs. To make these works, Williams first produces a small or medium-scale oil painting on canvas, which he considers a kind of study or, more aptly, something equivalent to a film photographer's celluloid negative. These are then photographed and used as source material for the inkjet-printed paintings on view. Williams' new works are preoccupied with the dialectic relationship between painting and photography, yet they seek to dishonor this very dialogue by stealing for themselves photography's quality of cool detachment.

Williams is jealous of the photographer's ability to indicate meaning in a subject without first having to work through the manifold and historically charged layers, as the painter does. This feeling of envy, however, is not simply an emotional state the artist is in; it is evidence of the complex relationship between the two media. Working in this new mode, Williams has found a strategy to mediate this jealousy. Painting as the "original," and often higher valued, medium carries with it the baggage of art history and thus delivers meaning only through the aforementioned layers. Taking photos of "real" oil on canvas portraits, Williams appropriates the advantages of photography: a clean indication of the subject matter detached from the struggle of its creation, free of physical traces of his craftsmanship, and the physicality of a corpus made of pigment and canvas.

In Williams' photographed paintings all of this—the materiality, the artist's decisions, the perceptual openness required of the viewer—is only a prerequisite, a negative of what is afterward photographed and printed. As a result, the smooth surface of the canvas, its industrial perfection frees this "negative" from its qualities as a painting—and at the same time from the historical baggage that seems to be required of a great painting. Rather than asking the viewer to parse through the medium, time, physicality, emotion, etc., the portraits are offered up fresh and clean: to be consumed, perhaps in a single bite.

Another effect of this new practice is an instantaneous confusion caused by the fact that the inkjet works are installed in juxtaposition to several of Williams' large-scale Puzzle Paintings. Using his representational drawings as appropriated images, Williams works through an analog process of drawing and collage to produce the source images for his Puzzle Paintings. The finished canvases present a discontinuous whole and summon the fragmented nature of our contemporary everyday. Many of the Puzzle Paintings share a palette and method with the photographed paintings. Williams is seemingly uninterested in the viewer's need to determine "which is which," however, the viewer's desire to make this distinction is inevitable. This somewhat awkward viewing process is among Williams' chief concerns for the show.

Though these works are highly conceptual, they bear a strong commitment to classical painting. Whether Williams composes his paintings on canvas or screen, they are informed by art history and pop-cultural iconography, whilst nonetheless leaving space for unexpected events to occur during the process. As a result, they emanate a sometimes ironic, sometimes funny tension that is always seductive to the eye.

Michael Williams was born in 1978 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. He has exhibited widely at venues and institutions such as: Secession, Vienna; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH; Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, TX; and the Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow; The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montreal, Montreal. His first solo show with Galerie Eva Presenhuber took place in 2014.

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