

Andy Denzler
Spectral Paintings

Nov 03 – Dec 21, 2023

Opening: November 02, 6-8pm, Zahnradstrasse 21, Zurich (Maag)

With *Spectral Paintings*, Galerie Peter Kilchmann Zurich for the first time features a series of new works by Swiss painter Andy Denzler. The paintings are a further evolution of his approach to create plains of imagination and projection and increase the artist's scope by capturing transient moments rooted in our collective memory. The exhibition entails paintings from the *Goya* and *Spectral* series as well as corresponding studies.

In his recent work, the artist expands his subject of distorted realities and opens up the canvas as well as the narrative of his paintings. Instead of urban individuals in their respective sceneries, he uses vintage photographs and classic movies - what the artist describes as our collective memory - as sources for the motifs in his paintings. While human figures remain at the core of his painterly exploration, in *Spectral Paintings* he paints them in combination with bold, expressive brush strokes that strongly evoke American abstract expressionists of the 1950s and the European *Neue Wilde* of the 1970s and 80s. His new works navigate this neo-expressionist mannerism by alternating between his familiar muted, earthy colors and newly included brightly colored plains and lines in free-flowing shapes within his compositions.

The origins of the *Spectral Paintings* lie in a period of intense introspection by the artist. Due to the pandemic, Denzler spent much of his time isolated in his studio in Zurich. Within these circumstances, themes such as fleeting interpersonal bonds and the transience of life and its components came into the artist's mind. Instead of staging his composition with urban creatives or capturing scenes on public streets, he rummaged through photo-historical archives to find content for his work. At the same time, he studied the paintings of Francisco de Goya and read about his history. The Spanish painter from the Romantic period only found the necessary freedom to fill his canvases with dramatic, socially critical content after he freed himself from the commissioned relationship with court painting. This liberation in relation to the content of his works left Denzler with a latent need to free himself from his own perceived artistic obligations. The works in the *Goya* series represent the beginning of this new phase. Together with a realization and a deepened sense of what fades with time, it led him to deconstruct and analyze not only the composition of his own persona but also the progression of his creative process.

In his artistic practice, Denzler has been inherently driven to creatively express himself through various media - be it in his twenties as a trained graphic designer, followed by his comprehensive activities as a landscape and street photographer, or as a producer of his own music. It was not until his late twenties that he realized that painting was his preferred medium to express all layers of visual and sensual elements belonging to the emotional, spiritual, and social issues he aimed to convey. It was then that he shifted his artistic activities from photography to painting, combining the two. In all of his creative undertakings, he meticulously learned the technical skills involved to precisely execute his artistic vision. This ambition was due to a deep respect for each respective artistic craft.

Photography has been at the center of Denzler's creative process. Until recently, he has been using photographs of urban creatives and street sceneries as a reference, often in conjunction with collage. With this technique, Denzler created scenes on the canvas that contained intimate spaces that evoked feelings of voyeurism and allowed the viewer interpretations out of a distant perspective. The subjects in Denzler's paintings were placed in introspective and toned-down settings in which they appeared to mysteriously phase in and out of their present and their past. He paints them with an understated sensibility for intimacy and nostalgia.

Despite the new emphasis on the inclusion of expressionist painting, photography is still a crucial element in his work. In *Spectral Paintings*, Denzler initiates the work with photorealistic facial features of the protagonists. He paints them in monochrome colors making them appear like excerpts from Black & White photographs. This is a nod to the vintage photographs and movies he uses as source material. He thereby provides an entry point for the viewer to the work. As Denzler paints the figure and composes it seemingly as unfinished, sometimes only revealing a small part of a face, the spectral aspect of it allows for open associations and personal projection. Once this access point is created Denzler executes the rest of the body as an abstract, almost ghostly, figure set in an environment of large color fields.

As he progresses on the canvas to create their surroundings, he quickly transitions into flattened forms, broadly painted color fields, intense brush strokes, and accentuation lines. The figures in the new paintings are set in critical moments of transition, transformation, or decisive action. They also express the artist's recent contemplations about transience and the otherworldly - the question of what lies between the here and there as well as how to capture a

wide multitude of possible realities and how to connect with them. His protagonists are not standing in an empty space, they much rather appear to be set in an open field containing lots of dynamic elements and apparitions.

Two of the landmark works of *Spectral Paintings* are *Boxer #1, after Visconti*, and *Boxer #2, after Visconti*. They exemplify not only the new combination of techniques in the current series – they also include Denzler's inclusion of critical observation and commentary on social issues. The scene depicted in the paintings is inspired by Italian director Luchino Visconti's 1960s film *Rocco and His Brothers / Rocco i suoi Fratelli* with Alain Delon. Set in Milan, it tells the story of a migrant family from southern Italy and its disintegration into the society of the industrial north. Simone, the second brother, struggles to adapt to urban life. He becomes attracted to a sex worker, who urges him to pursue a career in boxing, as a fast way to reach fame and wealth. The moment captured in the painting is when the brothers enter the boxing den in Milan. The artist shines a light on issues like poverty, social mobility, social injustice, and power struggles. However, at the same time, he instills his subjects with a powerful agency and the possibility to, at least in the viewer's imagination, succeed in their struggle.

Similarly, the painting series *Wild Vacation* refers to movies from the 1940s. Filmed during the Second World War, they each feature protagonists who face tragic or life-threatening circumstances in an environment that strongly limits their range of actions. The movie *Wild Vacation / Wilder Urlaub* tells the story of a Swiss deserter in 1943 and was released within the same period when Axis powers surrounded the country. The simple soldier Mitrailleur Hermelinger, played by Swiss actor Robert Trösch, allegedly slays a superior officer who harasses him and escapes to Zurich to hide where he lives under constant threat of being discovered. The series of paintings titled *Wild Vacation* entails several portrait studies of the actor – the abstracted shape leaves it up to the viewer to judge the characters' actions and motivations.

In *The Last Chance / Die letzte Chance*, an internationally acclaimed Swiss war movie from 1945, a duo of Allied soldiers escape from an Italian prison camp and make their perilous way to the Swiss border. The main actors had been prisoners of war in real life. Denzler captures the anxiety and uncertainty of the protagonists through the visibly concerned figures in the large-scale paintings. The chances of success in their journey into safety are as unquantifiable as their free-flowingly painted environment. Other works like the small painting *Dryland* address environmental issues, an eerie feeling about the scarcity of resources, and the overcoming of one's own helplessness in the face of monumental challenges.

Denzler's *Spectral Paintings* symbolize both a personal consideration about the passage of time, what stays behind, and a painter's sovereign ability to provide spaces for projection. It is an invitation to engage in an open dialogue with his work and give the viewer the opportunity to discover a deeper meaning on a more personal level.

Andy Denzler (*1965) was born in Zurich where he lives and works. He obtained a Master of Fine Arts degree at the Chelsea College of Art and Design in London in 2006.

His works have been exhibited in numerous solo and group shows in Europe, the United States and Asia in private and public institutions including the Gwangju Museum of Art, the Ludwig Museum in Koblenz, the Ludwig Galerie Schloss in Oberhausen, the Kunsthalle in Rostock, in Germany and he recently had a major retrospective at the Kunstforum in Vienna. In 2015, Denzler participated in the 6th Beijing International Biennale and in 2016, at the 6th Marrakech Biennale. His work is part of major collections including the Denver Art Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal, the David Roberts Art Foundation in London, the Tel Aviv Museum of Modern Art, the MOMA Moscow, as well as the Museum Würth in Schwäbisch Hall, in Germany, the Burger Collection in Hong Kong and the White Cube Collection in London.

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