

PIA FRIES
blau und rau

13.09. – 26.10. 2024

Mai 36 Galerie is excited to present new paintings by Pia Fries this September. The works assembled in this exhibition are recognized as a coherent body of work through their shared motif. In these pieces, the artist allows paint and veneer—with its texture, grain, and color—to emerge not only as visual elements but also as essential material components of her art.

Abstract – Concrete

Pia Fries' works unfold in the tension between abstraction and concrete-ness. They are created through layers, transparencies, and branchings—also in relation to the combination of different techniques. In the screen printing process, the artist has placed images of logs, blocks of wood, or timbers at various points on the canvas. They differ in their shape and structure, yet in each painting, Pia Fries focuses on similar depictions: from driftwood or wood blocks with exposed, fibrous, split longitudinal sides to soft woods with coarse cross-sections (so-called tracheids) to timbers that are leaning against each other or stacked crosswise. The underlying trunks or branches were treated differently, such as with sandblasting, sawing, or chopping. They were then photographed, exposed onto screen printing plates, and manually printed in different colors on the completely or partially white-primed canvas.

Transformed Matter

Visual experience begins and ends with colors. They play a central role in human perception—alongside other important factors like brightness, shape, and movement. In combination, these aspects influence the response to visual stimuli: a complex process that develops in Pia Fries' works between abstract idea and concrete execution. Starting from color as an original and undefined substance, the artist translates it into shaped matter. She pours oil paints from cans, squeezes them from tubes or presses, and molds the viscous paint into reliefs. By rotating and turning the canvases, she lets diluted colors flow into each other in streaks. By shaking and striking, she makes the color vibrate. She mixes, layers, smudges, and furrows the material using brushes, spatulas, rakes, and specially developed tools.

The picture supports, made by a carpenter, hold the weight of the paint and provide a resistant surface. On this smooth, partially white-primed stage, color figures can be removed, scraped off, or cut away. Additionally, the artist can incorporate the texture of the wooden panels into her paintings. On the one hand, the color of the wood surfaces in the unprimed areas, and on the other hand, Pia Fries can compositionally incorporate, conceal, or stage the grain pattern. Chance and randomness go hand in hand in this process, as do planning and intuition.

Play with Reality

By combining printmaking and painting, Pia Fries connects the reality of depiction with the reality of color. She thus refers to a style, especially of Cubism, in which wood grains or structures were imitated in paintings or collages: Faux Bois (French for “false wood”). This technique was originally used in Trompe-l'œil, illusionistic painting, and in crafts. It aimed to astonish viewers with surfaces that were deceptively realistic. Pia Fries adopts this approach to explore the interplay between real wood and painterly imitation in her works. Faux Bois is not at the forefront of her works; rather, she focuses on the concrete: in the paintings shown in this exhibition, the grain and structure of wood can be viewed as if under a magnifying glass. The focus is on the unknown within the known, the dissimilar similarities.

– Thérés Lubinetzki