

Tal R *Sexshops*

Private View 6 – 8pm, Tuesday 19 September 2017

Exhibition 20 September – 20 December 2017

Victoria Miro, 16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



Image: *Dirty Dick*, 2017

Pigment and rabbit skin glue on canvas

193 x 238 cm / 76 x 93 3/4 in

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The exteriors of sex clubs, massage parlours, strip clubs, adult theatres and other red-light establishments from around the world are depicted in new paintings by Copenhagen-based artist Tal R.

With their areas of flat, unmodulated colour and deceptively simple compositions, Tal R's paintings have long questioned our conception of and presumptions about our surrounding reality – what we see and where its meaning and beauty lies. In these new works he brings a quizzical eye to the largely unconscious actions of seduction, desire and gratification. Approaching his subject matter non-judgmentally, Tal R sees the sex shop façade as being metaphorically allied to the function of desire within a painting. For the artist, that which is on display is only successful in as much as it activates the imagination, hinting at something tantalisingly out of reach; in the 'back room' as the artist says – unseen and unknown. Keeping us on the outside is a deliberate creative strategy. Working from photographs, some sent by friends and acquaintances from around the world, Tal R is on the outside too: shut out by closed doors and frosted windows, which he paints with varying degrees of abstraction in dazzlingly seductive hues.

Largely devoid of people, the paintings imply meetings – perhaps between viewer and a potential object of desire – that take place beyond the façade, beyond the surface of the canvas. As the artist says: 'The fascinating thing for me about *Sexshops* is the idea of something being withheld, and the link with how painting operates similarly in that it's this surface that invites you in. But what is actually inside the image? There is a weird parallel between any façade and a painting: both of them are a flat surface but they promise a three-dimensional experience.'

From anonymous doorways to brightly-patterned windows, there are distinct shifts in tone and mood – compare the relatively subdued colour scheme of *Zwänglos*, 2017 (meaning 'relaxed' in German), a Berlin swingers club, with the cheerful candy stripes of

Venus, 2017. Yet, as to the venues themselves, and what kind of experience they might offer, while some paintings hint at what goes on behind closed doors most tell us almost nothing about the exact nature of their business, or even their location. *Dirty Dick*, a former hostess bar in Paris that retained its outré name when it became an upscale watering hole, reveals a little of the surrounding Parisian Belle Époque architecture. More often, though, the paintings confirm that, whether in Antwerp, Prague, Tel Aviv or LA, these venues, untouched by corporate identity, exist in a parallel world of homespun graphic design and occasionally lost-in-translation signage.

The paintings operate on different levels. There are the plain facts of the scene, cleanly delineated, but also an undercurrent of modernist abstraction, their lattices of doors and windows offering readymade grids that, inevitably, bring to mind names such as Malevich or Mondrian. In these simplified schemes, Tal R navigates a terrain between abstraction and representation, as well as a long history of art that interrogates inside and outside space – à la Bonnard, Matisse and Picasso – and the threshold between the momentary and the eternal: what we see and what we know. Any anthropomorphic reading of his windows and doors is between the viewer and their subconscious.

Sexshops continue a significant evolution in Tal R's working practice, a process similar to the historical use of distemper, in which pure pigments are mixed with rabbit skin glue to achieve canvases that glow with Rothko-like intensity. At the same time, limiting opportunity for addition and revision, this process has resulted in a series of stripped-back compositions. The artist's ability to seduce and engage, to make a beautiful image, is laid bare. Yet the exact nature of the experience, what turns us on as viewers and why, remains part of the essential mystery of painting. As Tal R says: 'Most people don't really choose what they find attractive, or what they reach out for. It is somehow constructed in their upbringing and unconsciousness and it's the same with painting. In the end, you reach out for what you need to reach out for, what speaks to you. There's no way to help it.'

About the artist

Born in Tel Aviv in 1967, Tal R lives and works in Copenhagen. One of the most influential artists of his generation, he held a Professorship at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 2005 to 2014 and has been the subject of major exhibitions at international institutional venues. The major solo exhibition *Academy of Tal R* opened at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark in May 2017, and will subsequently tour to Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (14 October 2017 – 14 January 2018). Previous solo exhibitions have been staged at institutional venues including ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark (2013 - 2014); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2013); Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria, travelling to Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (both 2013); Museu Brasileiro da Escultura, São Paulo (2012); Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (2012); Kunstverein Augsburg-Holbeinhaus, Augsburg, Germany (2011); Der Kunstverein, Hamburg (2011); Magasin III Museum & Foundation for Contemporary Art, Stockholm (2009); Kunsthalle Tübingen, Tübingen (2009); Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (2008); Camden Arts Centre, London (2008); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark (2007); and Kunsthalle Mannheim (2007). Numerous monographs are in print; the most recent, written by Terry R Myers and published by Lund Humphries in its Contemporary Painters Series, is due for publication in late 2017.

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