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OPENING HOURS
TUESDAY - SATURDAY
11:00 AM > 07:00 PM

Nathan Hylden: So Doing

13 October – 17 November, 2018

Opening Saturday 13 October 2018, 5pm to 8pm.

A recurring subject in Nathan Hylden's paintings is the artist's studio, his studio specifically, as seen in his last exhibition at Art : Concept in 2014. Through the history of the modern painting, the artist's studio has developed as a signifier of the superiority of creative activity by the representation of its trivial realities. Seen as what might be the first tautological figure in the rhetoric of art, the artist's studio as subject can be a site where the myth of the artist is at once invoked and deconstructed.

Hylden's new paintings depict crumpled balls of paper on the studio floor, like cast-off ideas. The crumpled paper balls, repeatedly photographed, are pure pretext for formal experiments using light effects and cast shadows, duplication, notions of emptiness and fullness, painting and luminous effects, in an exercise of sublimation which, since Vermeer, can be seen as a waste object.

But we cannot ignore the metonymic character of the crumpled papers and their relationship to the idea of idleness that, in the postmodern era, has replaced the image of the inspired artist in his studio. It is also very tempting to establish a narrative link between the paper balls that litter the ground and the repeated image of the bored schoolboy from the series presented during Hylden's first exhibition at the gallery, under the title *Just Something Else* (2007).

Let us come to the point: There is a question here of painting and deferral, the admission of which, if it is to pass for a coquetry, "supports" the painting – to use an obsolete term. It is this assumption that holds the suspense of a work stuck to the paradigm of the eternal return, based on the repetition of strict gestures and protocols borrowed from different traditions: printing, visible brush strokes, stenciled spray-paint on ready-made supports. These very precise manufacturing steps are often described, in Hylden's critical approach to work, as so many ways of continuing, by doing, to undo the presuppositions of painting. This is the assertion of the title "So Doing", which seems to strip the formula "In so doing" and to subtract from it its intentional dimension in order to pretend, again, to refer to an inconsistent activity. Is it not proper to serious painting to be ironic about the very fact of continuing to exist?

The complex arrangement of steps in the process for making Hylden's paintings brings opposing principles together: The unique gesture opposed to mechanical reproduction, the artist's withdrawal to the persistence of the mystery of creation (kept secret in a crumpled paper and by a frozen pictorial gesture), an economy of means that doesn't prevent the sophistication of the result; the impartiality of a process that nevertheless generates a profoundly melancholic object which is almost always defined by a residue that remains after everything has been stripped off. Beautiful paintings on nothing that contain everything, as has been said of Andy Warhol's "Shadows" (1978) (the mechanical repetitions of a shadow). Here the subject is none other than the work's own rejected idea, the erased intention of painting. Whatever the ambition, what appears is not the trace of the gesture but that of its cancellation, in short the statement that a work will not take place. It is by the repetition of the delayed moment, generating delicate contours and sensual textured surfaces that such a redundant absence gives rise to a strange presence of the work.

Written by Julie Portier.
Translated by Frieda Schumann.

