

**Jan-Ole Schiemann**

*Mantis Mannequins*

**Exhibition:** 9 September – 17 October 2020

On the occasion of this year's Gallery Weekend Berlin, Wentrup is pleased to present the first solo show by Jan-Ole Schiemann at the gallery: *Mantis Mannequins*.

Based on a visual vocabulary of complex forms and surreal body fragments, Jan-Ole Schiemann's works oscillate between abstract painting and anthropomorphic figuration. His pictorial worlds create a dense, sometimes transparent mesh that abandons the contours of clearly defined, spatial structures in favour of interwoven compositions. The structures of the pictorial space, created on the basis of stencils and shadowy fields of ink, seem to work themselves deeply into the pictorial planes. In the paintings, they are delicately woven to form a superimposing net, which, in the manner of collages, takes up the multiple references to comics, gestural abstraction, and early animation film, and combines them in ever new variations.

The large-format works come about not just in dialogue with their references, but also link themselves in a continuous interchange to a formal language created in drawings and watercolours. In this language, pencil and ink organically outline details, dismember hybrid bodies, and link sections of lines – and then reshape themselves synthetically in the paintings in front of us into a wholly new visual universe.

Based on the associative universe of forms of a pencil drawing, *Mantis Mannequins* is also subject to a symbiotic concept of relations, on whose basis the works in the new series were created in close relation to one another – both formally and in terms of motifs. The drawing is the point of departure, the original idea, from which different articulations of painting develop in a pseudo-revolutionary process.

Powerful, and determined by signal-like paint blotches in shimmering shades of red and blue, on the one hand they create a dynamic thicket, where the modules of the original form elements adapt themselves cleverly. In another painting, in contrast, they turn into staggered black lines where they can only be sensed rather than properly seen, and which seem calm only at first sight. Only to suddenly reveal their organic body parts, consisting of circles, spirals, and abstract antennae between dark overlays, hinted-at geometric segments, or in a mixture of shapes running into each other in hues of red, black, and white. Contours, lines, and fields update themselves rhythmically as the result of an automatic drawing process. Painting and drawing here know of each other because they are related, since the fragments of the originally drawn composition take on a life of their own as fragments in the painterly work of the series as environments – as relationships of object and surroundings, and ambivalent spatial structures.

Like the process of composition, the underlying drawing is also a medium of a cognitive process, during which the figure of the mantis, which also lends the work its title, reveals itself in outline before our eyes. Derived from the praying mantis or, in Latin, *mantis religiosa*, it stands, like every single picture, for an embodiment of diversity. For a series of different forms of appearance, in which it lustfully and colourfully presents itself,

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sometimes all the way to invisibility, like posing mannequins. As an extreme example of evolutionary niche formation and adaptation to its environment, it moves as an anthropomorphic motif like a humorous figure, seemingly without a care in the world, through the paintings of the series. Elegantly bent and with large eyes before a vaguely outlined background that dissolves into a mixture of faintly pink and yellowish-orange clouds of colour, as an imitation of a layering of shapes, or as a figurative silhouette whose contours suddenly appear between deeply green colour fields. All these observations seem to be appropriate for describing the mischievously formal game of hide and seek, of mimicry on the canvas. A camouflage effect through which the compositions evade the beholder's gaze to the same degree to which they reveal themselves in the next moment as their own formal counterpart.

The figure of the mantis becomes a symbolic animal here, whose ability to constantly change between camouflage and revelation not only facilitates a playful retreat into a visual world that is closed to our perception. Rather, it is also a sign of painterly and evolutionary freedom that mixes idealized narratives of the animal, visual and plant world, revealing the works' gestural compositions as projection surfaces that expand our emerging associations in the process of continuous self-abstraction.

Like mannequins, the paintings change their partially grotesque-fantastical appearance, and point in their constant digestion of their original repertoire of forms to the rupture of their self-generated plan or design as a necessary condition of their composition. In so doing, the compositions turn their graphic lines inside out, interlocking themselves anew with the organic structure of forms, and laying down once again traces that point ambivalently both to their origin and their updating. To a process where the mantis, as the title suggests, proverbially becomes a mannequin – a symbol that allows us to grasp figuration and abstract painting as something fluid, connecting them mischievously through masking and imitation, in a continuous transformation of form and colour.

Philipp Fernandes do Brito

Translated by Wilhelm Werthern

Jan-Ole Schiemann (born in Kiel in 1983) studied at Kunsthochschule Kassel and at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with Albert Oehlen and Andreas Schulze. He was a member of Andreas Schulze's master class.

Works by Jan-Ole Schiemann are in numerous collections, including the Bronx Museum, New York; the Craig Robins Collection, Miami; the Hort Family Collection, New York; The Marciano Collection, Los Angeles; the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit; the Rubell Family Collection, Miami; and the Margulies Collection, Miami.