

I KNOW THAT YOU KNOW THAT I KNOW

If you could never see these paintings, how would I retell them to you? Perhaps by not offering you another image, but a feeling for the sense of it instead.

Imagine traversing a corridor, by commuting from one side to the other: to your left *Berlin* - to your right the long black and brown feathers of a bird - to your left a red, yellow, and blue square - to your right a chandelier - to your left a merry-go-round. You stop and turn. Walk back and look again. Some themes recur, while you walk through the hall, as if the merry-go-round would move around the viewer, while she tries to stabilize her position in the exhibition space. There appears the impression that one has seen this colour, outline, shape, structure before. Imagine the sense of déjà vu triggered by a familiar motif.

Martina Steckholzer's conceptual paintings transfer what is momentarily internationally displayed in form and content into fractured painterly gestures and surfaces. To look at her paintings means on the one hand to look at what is currently fetched from archives and studios for exhibitions in museums, galleries and fairs. On the other, it means that one is exposed to her subjective perception, which adapts the documented motives in an often brute exploration of painterly gesture.

So, although a déjà vu effect might creep up in the viewer, there equally discloses an unmistakable void in the encounter with her paintings. No matter how fully painted a surface appears, or how fully painted it is discover after zooming into its detailed structure: there is some frictional resistance in Steckholzer's way of painting, deriving from a dual approach. While her painting is on the one hand carefully planned it on the other suggests to have been left behind half open. This friction recurs not only in the single image space, but also in the serial. A seesaw opens up in a territory for perception that could verbally be expressed by one of the image titles: *I know that you know that I know*. While an acknowledgment of acknowledgment takes place between the two participants, it remains unclear *what* is actually known by the speaker.

Steckholzer argues that her paintings are not windows, functioning as facilitators, to look at something. As she approaches her motifs in a both documental and fictional mode of memorising, she renders them in perspective and detailed view almost unrecognisable. Consequently representation fails (as if it was meant to make smoothly legible the one represented).

This is primarily, because she is not so much interested to represent the motifs appropriated in a new setting, but to use them and the display situation, in which the encounter with the object originally took place, as an informing impact to explore a new potentiality of conceptual painting.

Walk again, to your left and to your right. Have a close look or alternatively let your attention be diverted from what lies ahead of you. *Watch me as I watch you watching me.*

Veronika Hauer on Martina Steckholzer's paintings,
September 2008