

Anne Neukamp

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Ping-Pong against Determinative Rigidity

Let's start with what complicates matters: Anne Neukamp's paintings can't be reduced to a common denominator: clear geometrical forms are marked by amorphous ornamental structures on monochrome surfaces of muted shades of colour. Many-layered and delicate textures border on smoothly and swimmingly applied paint. Resolute pentimenti (traces left by over painting) encounter contemporary sfumato.

In short, it is as if Neukamp's most recent paintings are not merely content to play off different zones, different painting techniques and heterogeneous surface conditions against one another. In addition they feature implied figurative fragments and occasional trompe-l'oeil effects which instigate an automatic recourse to possible references and yet never quite come off. If from a distance the geometric net formation in *Aussicht [View]* is reminiscent of fishnet tights, in closer proximity the figurative association is overturned. For it is not the network but its negative form - or more precisely the numerous characteristic holes - which swirls as the obviously final layer of paint on the surface of the canvas. The apparent stockings are revealed not as the nodal point of a presumed meaning, but as a fragmentary indication. It is simply impossible to reconcile the pictorial imagination with what is portrayed. The painterly method always gets in the way of a reifying reception instead of, as expected, disappearing behind the portrayal. The aesthetic eye is continually and cunningly restrained.

Neukamp's paintings have the effect of picture puzzles in as much as they bring our visual thought up to speed and alter what they show at every turn. For example, the skin-coloured, shadowed zone in *Fermate [Fermata]* initially suggests the impression of physicality and associations that fluctuate between buttocks and breasts, or include both. The skin colour is an immediate invitation to erotic fantasies of all kinds. But a view of the whole painting immediately puts the break on any idea of synthesised body images along with their erotic connotations.

The moment we become imaginatively caught up in these illusionistic fragments, the perception of the surrounding abstract and ornamental figurations holds access to their apparent incompleteness in check: the fantasy is toppled into uncertainty. The gaze is refracted by these interwoven structures; the skin-coloured zone turns out to be a sophisticated visual trap. There is a great deal of potential illusion here, and countless loose ends, but there is never an illusionary space pretending dominance over objects.

So there is much to do, as the paintings never hide behind a fixed assertion. As soon as the eye enters the formal textures, new aspects emerge while others fade away. Remaining in one place causes things to continue differently elsewhere. But in this state of maximum indeterminacy we wish to reach an end at some point - and can do nothing other than start again at the beginning.

However, the ambiguity that sets the tone in Neukamp's paintings does not exhaust itself in a self-referential game. The artist's points of departure are images taken from stickers, advertisements or magazines, and their not entirely controllable densification and alteration in size through the compositional process of overpainting, blurring and negation. These motifs now outgrow their original significance as aspects of visual materiality and are removed from all mechanisms of utility and exploitation. Yet Neukamp doesn't rely on an aesthetic strategy that gives rise to other meanings in retrospect, as it were; she contrives her own categories of visibility, which are neither tied to a hierarchical order, nor to a visual syntax and certainly not to a systematic unity.

Every painting shows evidence of protracted re-working: the visible surfaces lie on top of older layers that partially force their way to the uppermost levels. The disparate elements - from the painting technique to the figurative quotations to the combination of heterogeneous pictorial elements - make their appearance in a conciliatory manner. And yet they join together with remarkable compositional elegance, producing a singular sense of in-betweenness that can potentially flip in any direction. This almost amounts to a refusal of the latent mania for explaining painting: playing with the expectations of the genre has rarely been so effortless and confident. For confidence does not arise from a determination of painting, nor from aligning oneself with this or that style, but from the ability to initiate a ping-pong between affirmation and negation in the mode of visual thinking.

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