

Helmhaus Zürich

28 September to 18 November 2012

X

Painting in Zürich

There's a lot of painting going on in Zürich – but you don't see much of it in exhibitions. It's high time to change that. Figurative or nonfigurative, thoughtfully executed or spontaneously expressed, romantically rendered or coolly calculated: this exhibition surveys the field of Zurich's disparate painterly landscape in 150 works, representing emerging and established artists, both well-known and long-forgotten. The X in the title is a sign of the times, of tables turned and the powers of multiplication. This selective inventory is both compelling and challenging. It draws renewed attention to a long underrated medium. What is on the table here is both a feast for the eye and food for thought.

X backs up every painting: it is the form of the struts that support the canvas frame.

X takes the eye at face value; or sometimes deceives and misleads it.

X marks the spot: an image yet to come or one that has gone before. The image of painting already formed, or still taking shape – capturing memories or inventing the future.

X is the basis of all the painting shown at the Helmhaus. The rectangle is neither abandoned nor reinterpreted. At most, it is shifted out of kilter in a brush with the third dimension.

X means potentially infinite solutions, even in a small city like Zurich.

X stands for exemplary individuality: Xceptional.

X is the sign of multiplication, of painting squared, of times in which the sign might supersede the painting itself. All painting is semiotic; all painters set signs and leave traces.

Paintings are like chromosomes, with similarities and differences – XX and XY – but always with a unique genetic footprint. No two are ever the same.

X is the letter that painters use to describe the world, to overwrite it, to x it out. Quite literally at times – as in the works of Clare Goodwin and Jahanguir.

X has four extremes. You Painting can be extremely figurative (Florian Bühler), extremely non-figurative (Clare Goodwin), extremely reflective (Valentin Hauri), or extremely emotional (Giampaolo Russo).

X spans surfaces, plumbs depths, pierces the gaze.

X is the most efficient means of defining a plane. And painting is one of the most difficult means of formulating that plane.

X imposes precise ratios upon light and shadow, figure and ground, form and colour.

X is an unknown factor. X Files, Project X and Mister X imply an uncanny revenant, like painting itself, constantly resurrected.

X is an individual. A portrait. A still life as portrait. A landscape as still life.

X suggests something beyond itself: elusive, shimmering, oscillating, generating afterimages.

X number of possibilities are open to painters. And yet, in the history of painting, it seems that everything has already been painted. Against this backdrop, continuing in its tradition or breaking its mould, artists continue to paint. On the coordinate plane of painting, new crosspoints emerge. One new X after another.

X is easily said; less easily grasped. It takes time – and cannot always be fully deciphered.

X is blank, when painting draws a blank.

X is a game; deadly serious. A paradox.

X is vital.

X is painting.

Simon Maurer and Daniel Morgenthaler

Curators of the exhibition

Participating Zurich Artists

Tina Braegger, Florian Bühler, Prafull Davé, El Frauenfelder, Clare Goodwin, Bettina Graf, Dieter Hall, Christoph Hänslı, Valentin Hauri, Jahanguir, Vera Ida Müller, Ann Nelson, Giampaolo Russo