

In Review

Report a p

Chris Kline

GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN, MONTREAL

by STEPHEN HORNE



The formal grace of this installation of new paintings by Chris Kline is enhanced by its counterpoint of material precision and visual simplicity. I use the musical term counterpoint not only to acknowledge Kline's previous life as a guitarist in neo-punk bands, but also because the paintings create a visual rhythm between themselves and the gallery space.

Kline aligns our starting point as viewers of an exhibition with his starting point as a painter of paintings. That is, he begins with what is in front of us: an architectural interior, which in this context is related to the critical grid of modernist painting— more precisely, the grid of constructivist painting from Malevich through Agnes Martin. This could seem like a formula for dryness, but what elegantly turns the exhibition in entirely another direction is Kline's attention to the dimension of modernist history that is repressed by its own doctrine of rationalist criticality: the personal and esoteric dimension that arguably motivated such painters as Rothko and Martin to trace out the contours of their inner vision in their work.

The seven paintings in the show are actually identical but for nuanced shifts in colour. Each suspends a delicate, subdued bar of colour across a nearly transparent bare poplin canvas. The transparency allows us to perceive the work architecturally, as we can see through the canvas to the stretcher behind it and to the surface of the gallery wall. Kline's composition and colours bring to mind water and sky, light refracted through the shallow waters of a running stream (the reference is to the artist's boyhood memory of early-morning trout fishing in the calm rural streams of eastern Ontario). But this is also an artistic landscape, one in which early constructivism mingles with the narratives of loneliness recounted by Edward Hopper in his paintings of spaces empty but for shafts of sunlight and shadow.

The installation is distinguished by decisiveness and discretion —discretion in the sense of allowing the space to become itself: the work

leaves us with the paradox of a creative passivity. Kline inspires a viewer to pay careful attention to boundaries: insides are differentiated from outsides, light from dark, self from world. These paintings allow the gallery space to breathe, open and expand in response to the artist's activation of an emptiness that draws us in. Crafted with precision and attentive to the subtleties of surface and edge, these paintings are focused on the nature of boundaries and enclosure.

In his second solo show at Galerie René Blouin, Chris Kline has poetically affirmed his ethical commitment to artistic independence. Balanced between decorative delicacy and abstract formal rigour, his paintings hover between preciousness and utter modesty, between an absolute and a slash-and-burn void.

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