

TOBIAS PILS. SHH

The question of whether the images are abstract or figurative doesn't really arise for me. For me, it's more about the fact that it's a form of language. That I've developed a certain vocabulary or an alphabet that I have at my disposal, which I then recombine in different ways. I can only speak about something I know. So, if there are children in the pictures, then it has to do with my own children; if there are broken body parts, then it's because I broke my shoulder. But I always try to combine this very personal aspect with something foreign, so that it doesn't stick to me, but rather passes through me and lands somewhere else. The ideal state of a painting for me is when I come into the studio the next day and it feels completely unfamiliar, or I even briefly have the feeling that it couldn't be mine. Which is hard to achieve. The exhibition covers roughly the last ten years of Tobias Pils' artistic work, and we decided very early on to think of the exhibition in reverse — starting with the newest works on the entrance level. The entrance level shows the last three years, and everything before that — with the exception of the wall painting, which was created specifically for this exhibition — can be seen on level -2. The wall painting is a work that... I find it quite beautiful that there are works that have a lifespan for a certain period of time. And it's actually an echo of a particular painting — Untitled (Mädchen), which is also on the catalog cover — and it's like an echo of this girl standing upright in the painting, which has now been laid into this space and has almost transformed from a painterly form into a graphic one. It's also like an oversized drawing. The exhibition doesn't just show paintings from the last ten years, but also a whole series of drawings, which isn't surprising because Tobias Pils originally comes from drawing. At 17 or 18, when art became a daily practice for me, I only drew. But that was due to necessity, because I only had a very small space available. And as I immersed myself in the medium of drawing, a vast space opened up, and that didn't stop for a long time. Eventually, though, it wasn't enough for me anymore, so I started painting, and the black-and-white from drawing carried over. But I never felt like I was a black-and-white painter. The question of color or no color never really came up; it was never necessary. And then, two or three years ago, I accidentally picked up the wrong paint tube at the art supply store, and a blue crept in. I had this blue tube in the studio and just used it. Mixing the blue with a yellowish gray, an ochre, resulted in a greenish painting. From there, I thought: Well, if it's already green, I might as well buy an actual green paint. So I got some green and kept working, and that's how it developed. There are also works created with ink, and these ink drawings are always like reflections or meditations on already completed paintings. They're not sketches; they don't prepare paintings. Rather, they explore the question of revisiting something finished, sensing or re-experiencing it. I usually work on just one painting at a time, and each painting more or less gives birth to the next. There's always some new moment in each painting — a little window that opens up a new chapter or a new space. One of mumok's tasks is to present Austrian artists with international reach, and Tobias Pils has had exhibitions in Germany, the USA, and many places around the world in recent years. So it seemed like a good time to present a larger exhibition here in Vienna that offers deeper insight into his artistic work. What this means for me — I can't really say yet. It's kind of like... I once said to a colleague: For me, this exhibition could be, or is, a bit of a reconciliation with Vienna. And he said to me: No, you should definitely not reconcile — that's bad for art.