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Techniques of the Observer

Gillian Carnegie, Lois Dodd, Thomas Eggerer, Michael Fullerton, Michael Krebber, Stuart Middleton, Elizabeth Peyton, Walter Price, Elliott Jamal Robbins, Giangiacomo Rossetti, Nolan Simon, Katharina Wulff

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Ground Floor

Visual culture is currently undergoing a major historical rupture: for the first time, mechanical imagery no longer follows a humanist model, mimicking the neural and physiological design of retinal sight. Technology has developed new models of visualization indifferent to the codes by which we've long processed images and organized their logic. Observation, as Jonathan Crary has indicated in *24/7*, has become systemized and quantifiable – mediated intake of images can be monitored and surveilled. This exhibition will survey the persistence of observational painting within this charged arena, presenting artists who take both radical and restorative approaches, both responding to current visual codes and bypassing their interferences. Some artists reflect back the cool detachment that has infiltrated realism through digital techniques, others practice with an immediacy and sensuality more closely related to the impressions of the human eye. All of the artists on view engage representation as the concept itself rapidly shifts.

Thomas Eggerer's vertiginous new paintings portray fragmented young bodies from impossible angles, strangely coalescing around signifiers of consumption and authority. Painting from an aerial and perpendicular view, Eggerer's vantage point underlines the use of both aerial and subterranean space to maximize urban real estate and infrastructure. Eggerer eliminates horizon lines and suggests what's underneath rather than what's beyond—an effect compounded by the painting's central manhole, which signifies depth without proffering it. Depicted in cool tones, the folds in his clothes and topography of his face expertly contoured against a hard horizon line in the background, the young man depicted in *S* (2016) is among Gillian Carnegie's serial subjects. Carnegie approaches the rigor of genre painting as readymade, circumscribed parameters in which to explore multiple valences of perception. Repeatedly engaging with her subject under various conditions, her still lifes, portraits, and other sources splinter into a series of impressions, exposing their bare materiality and that of paint itself.

Michael Krebber's *Untitled* (2007) obscures its source—the backdrop of Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*—through several layers of mediation. Likely a painted backdrop to begin with, Krebber compounds his subject's filmic translation, generating a sequence of facsimile ever further removed from its source. The result is a distilled, archetypal still life, its ghostly tonal inversions recalling a retinal afterimage. Elizabeth Peyton paints from a photograph of a video of classical pianist David Frey, not only forging a distance between her painting and its source, but also enforcing a mediatic shift: Frey is isolated from sound, movement, and his craft, his contemplation rendered enigmatic.

Lois Dodd's window paintings navigate a tension between observational transcription and predetermined geometry. In *Back of Men's Hotel (from My Window)* (2016), Dodd paints the view from the quintessential portal for observation, reciprocated across the street by a series of reflective squares, each shining back a varied night sky. Walter Price's invented spaces incorporate abstraction to achieve their structural ambiguity. Realism is detectable in signifiers and tenuous spatial organization; yet Price's topographic surface of paint resists an imagistic reading.

Elliott Jamal Robbins' work intersects social construction and self-perception to produce violently fractured narratives. In his *Walk Series*, installed here in sequence, Robbins paints stereotyped images in motion, only to repeatedly obliterate them—suggesting impeded progress. Stuart Middleton's drawings of cattle constitute pristine renderings of the sanitized violence of the livestock industry, confirming the image as a distancing mechanism. Drawn from photographs by the artist, taken at a county fair where the livestock was showcased, Middleton faithfully renders the animals' musculature and adornments. Middleton's practice on the whole examines the specific application of animal psychology to the livestock industry—an example of exploiting evolutionarily learned behavior to optimize production. In Nolan Simon's work, the most circulated, and opposed, of visual content collide—the religious motif, pornography, and social media. The work on view refers simultaneously to religious gesture and fetish, while also betraying the lighting of amateur photography to inflect the personal—executed with cool precision, the image is rendered a neutral space of projection.

Michael Fullerton's portraiture depicts figures at the intersection of media, technology, and power. For this exhibition, Fullerton presents *Groupie*: painted from a picture of a pre-teen model affecting an aloof adult, Fullerton titles the work for a term that, since the 1960s, has evolved from a descriptor of sexual agency to that of a power imbalance. On view by Katharina Wulff are two sparsely occupied and delicately rendered scenes, exemplifying the artist's engagement with, and updates of, German romanticism—transported to the artist's adopted home of Morocco. Each strangely halting in their articulation, these representational works become fantastic by way of what is omitted. Giangiacomo Rossetti's *Capriccio sopra la lontananza del suo fratello dilettissimo* (2019)—translates to *Capriccio on the departure of a beloved brother*, and originates from a seminal composition by J.S. Bach. Bach's piece was written as his brother left for Sweden, Rossetti's work was occasioned by his own departure from Milan. The work is sourced from his brother's Instagram, and framed with the *oroboro* – a snake eating its own tail.

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