

SEAN PENLINGTON

Hmhm,Haha

PTB: You talk about the body of works in Hmhm, Haha being about the act of looking at painting, I wondered if you could talk a little bit more about that.

SP: Well, of course you can say that any painting is *about* looking at painting, whilst also being about other things too, but I wanted to emphasise that the subject, if you like, of my work is very much caught up in the idea of experiencing painting, the idea of looking. Abstraction, which is a tricky word, is born out of itself and my work is only possible because of an existing vocabulary. I am saying that it is about looking at painting because I am riffing off of old meaning in order to discover new meaning.

PTB: When we spoke you also mentioned the idea of the works being 'knowingly uncomfortable', is this also part of that strategy to encourage active looking in the viewer ?

SP: I think it can be too easy to make a good looking painting, I think it's more interesting to make something else. There is complacency in some current painting whereby it can tend to look a little bit like something that used to be called serious, or once a painting achieves a desirable state it has somehow achieved *something*. I don't look at painting for that and I don't make it for that. Of course there are always moments of pleasure, joy, seduction and whatever, but mostly I want doubt and annoyance because that's when you really get into the psychology of the viewer, and if you can do that then that's a space where painting can find criticality, for me.

PTB: In the past, you've talked about liking the idea of different states acting within a painting. Can you talk a bit about how this relates to this body of work; in particular I'm thinking about the watch and how that creates an ongoing temporal narrative which will continue beyond the life span of the exhibition.

SP: This is about entering the world of the painting, everything has its own logic, its own value and its own quality – summarised as state. I am always looking for various states in the painting to act with events. An event for me is simply something which happens on the surface that usually adds to the painting's energy, it could be a drip cutting across another colour, or it could be a watch ticking. The watch in this sense is literally active; other events reveal themselves slowly through looking. What I find interesting is that the watch will eventually run out and stop, changing the state of that event and its relationship to other states, like the white snaking gesture which is a rather rigid ornamentation.

PTB: In something you recently sent me you said that the paintings that you are making could be a 'hyper-ball of self-consciousness' and in the same correspondence, you also said how you felt addressing the 'baggage of painting' was important 'because it can be used as a vocabulary to leap frog to a particular idea or narrative' – how do the paintings in Hmhm, Haha relate to these ideas ?

SP: Well I think this is what I'm dealing with; what happens to a painting when you are knowingly riffing off of self-aware painting? It then becomes a hyper-ball of self-knowing, which along with all of the other levels of information in a painting, amounts to a complicated viewing. The baggage in painting creates an expectancy, as I mentioned before this is useful for creating doubt and annoyance, there wouldn't really be much annoyance if there wasn't some baggage, because there wouldn't be anything to push against, there wouldn't be anything to get wrong or do differently, there wouldn't be an idea of what Yve-Alain Bois called a generational match in painting.