

IU Northwest Gallery For Contemporary Art

David Klamen: *Meta-Paintings*

In contrast to the artworld tradition of established artists creating works informed by a consistent visual language, the work of David Klamen embraces an aesthetic diversity that is directed instead by an expanding idea. In recent years, the scale of his work has shifted from Lilliputian to larger than life, the imagery from pictorial to digital abstraction and back, and the tone from the aggressive to the silent, yet in each there is a common commitment. All of these works use various visual images and processes in order to investigate the question of how we know our culture and our selves. Klamen's current paintings test epistemological strategies as diverse as OP Art (and its implication that knowledge may be a purely retinal experience), empiricism (the idea that the sole source of knowledge is direct quantifiable experience), introspection, and others. In this investigation, Klamen plays with the history of art, utilizing modern and pre-modern conventions as metaphors for our communal search for meaning.

In his most recent variation on this theme, Klamen has created a body of paintings of paintings (meta-paintings); these works often consist of paintings of paintings tilted at an oblique angle in space. Like his earlier work, these paintings explore and overlap seemingly incompatible epistemological positions. While these works reverently reproduced the aesthetic and physicality of a source painting, they also commented on it and undermined it through its trompe l'oeil portrayal. This is somewhat analogous to a musician "covering" a song by a seemingly incompatible performer... like Itzhak Perlman performing a song by Lil Wayne. Since Klamen's subject paintings are tipped back into space, they are not simply a Mike Bidlo style re-performance, appropriation, or forgery of an historical artwork. Instead, they work as self-conscious exercises in conflating two contrary concepts while bringing attention to the perspective of the viewer.

For example, Klamen's untitled painting of a Monet rigidly portrays an impressionistic work tilted slightly back into space on a gray wall. While Klamen's painting of the wall and frame has a carefully studied academic firmness, within the bounds of the depicted gilded frame he mimics the fluttering spontaneity of Monet's original brushwork. This creates an ambiguous (or perhaps contested) picture plane where the lush physical painted surface records both Klamen's touch and hovers back into the illusion of the receding wall. This is all accomplished with a dollop of tongue-in-cheek technical swagger that seems to wink at the suggestion that he can paint Monet – and he can do it at an angle.

In a related multi-canvas installation titled *Master Pieces (Scarcity)*, Klamen orchestrates twenty-eight separate abstract paintings in the style of Gerhard Richter into a salon style hanging. In concord with his other works, *Master Pieces (Scarcity)* overlaps the seemingly incompatible worldview of the nineteenth century salon with the decisively postmodern aesthetic of Richter. Klamen's installation shows considerable reverence for

Richter's artistic territory, while asking some difficult questions about authenticity, market values and intertextuality.

Though Klamen's investigations of epistemological concerns have generated paintings that have spanned an enormous visual range, they continue to show a deep commitment to visual experiences that are aesthetically sensuous and satisfying. From the dark, obscured imagery of his heavily varnished works to the disorienting pulse of his striped paintings and the overlapping picture planes of his most recent work, Klamen maintains a sensitivity to touch, to surfaces, and a commitment to the gestalt of the image. Although these works offer a challenge to their being "read," their various tactile pleasures suggest a world worth experiencing that celebrates the perplexities of knowing our culture and selves.

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