

ARTFORUM

"Bruno Jakob", Hans Rudolf Reust, Artforum, New York, USA, September, Vol. 54, 2015, pp. 401-402



During Bice Curiger's 2011 Venice Biennale, Tintoretto's complex spatial structures and supersensory lighting dominated the entrance to the central pavilion in the Giardini. But facing them was a white wall with a small label identifying it as the site of a painting by Bruno Jakob that had already evanesced, existing only in the artist's recollection or the viewer's imagination: Jakob paints with water or vapor, or by endowing a raw or primed ground with mental substance.

His most recent exhibition, "Hovering and

Pulsing," assembled works created between 1986 and the present to survey a microcosm of spiritual interrelations. As he or she would in a traditional retrospective, the visitor encountered various ensembles of works along the walls and on tables. But rather than displaying visible forms, the installation challenged us to understand the spiritual energy that has coursed through Jakob's decades-long creative process. "Hovering," the first term chosen for the show's title, designates a quality of this pictorial flow—attention perpetually poised between sensual and spiritual presence—that extends into the beholder's interaction with the painted work.

In the work on display, the artist used a variety of media to embody the material and immaterial traces of his actions—a delicate tinge, perhaps, or a warp in the paper. These faint signs were supplemented by viewers' awareness of the preceding painterly process, details of which were supplied by the extensive notes accompanying the pictures. In Jakob's work, abstraction, a reduction of optical visibility to the very edge of nothingness, becomes pulsing introspection. Those extraordinarily subtle and nuanced traces recall Marcel Duchamp's "infra-mince," the smallest conceivable micro-difference, which generally eludes visual demonstration; its native format is the allusive mind-game or pun. Duchamp's farewell to retinal art went hand in hand with his passion for wordplay and trenchant observations, and even today, his fans continue to pore over his every word. By contrast, and beyond the meticulous linguistic notation of what has happened, in Jakob's probing of the smallest perceptible difference, the invisible picture remains irrevocably bound up with the reality of the senses, unlocking a perceptual register that transcends the familiar dichotomy between Conceptual and materialized art.

One way Jakob interweaves the painterly process with the experience of nearly invisible pictures is by presenting his art in tandem with the tools he's used to create it. Another is through performative elements. This show was enhanced by a live action at the opening, titled *Fluid Performance—Extensions and Constructions*, in which Jakob used water and steam to draw on a slate panel, accompanied by the artist Hans Witschi on the piano.

Jakob, who was born in Switzerland in 1954, has lived in New York since 1983. He charted his approach to painting—its reduction to a mental realization—long before recent debates over purely speculative economies or virtual worlds. In 1999 he made a work titled *Philosophy Escaped (Invisible Painting) The Peoples Energy (Still Collecting)*, whose materials are described as "energy on primed green canvas." Time and again, turns of phrase such as "still collecting" let Jakob defer a resolution of the process of interaction between painting and perception, between individual act and collective understanding—and so the quietly nagging question of whether some sublime humor might be mingled with such insight into the invisible is left unanswered.

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.