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About this review

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Tillman Kaiser

Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

Tillman Kaiser, 'Don't Worry About the Motion on the Ocean' (2008), installation view.

Roll back the clock about a century, and try to put yourself in the shoes of an art lover from that time – be it a well-heeled Parisian bourgeoisie or a proletarian Sunday painter – and think about how Modernism's first volleys of abstraction must have looked to those fresh eyes. The historical record is filled with the hysterical screeds and screams of critics ('My eyes did bleed!'; 'The end is nigh!'), but there is little of the viewers who – like us – were open to the whims of creativity. No matter what sort of preparation or level of taste, their first reactions of 'huh?' before their subsequent acceptance or rejection must have been delightful to witness. Tillman Kaiser's show has that 'eve of Modernism' feel to it, with humble materials forged into a dorky sophistication that has the naiveté of optimism, or at the very least risks being thought of as uncool.

The sculptures in this show build upon this vocabulary of modernity with angular forms and a limited black or white palette. *Coat* (2007) has black wings like a stealth bomber, trailing behind a metal box – encrusted with a mysterious patina – that appears less found than unearthed. Pointing skywards, it comes across like a tiny war machine with an old surplus cockpit out front, the mix of which is successful. In *What Goes Around Comes Around* (2008), black squat diamond shapes stand tall, all connected in the centre. With glass eyes affixed on each corner of these upright argyles, it could pass for a large Masonic compass or fancy drill bit. *This* (2008) looks like a 23rd-century tricycle made up of solid kite-shaped forms. The sleek structure is covered in a flat white paint that belies its plain cardboard underpinnings, and reeks of movement and purpose.

Tillman Kaiser, 'Don't Worry About the Motion on the Ocean' (2008), project room installation view.

The paintings also do their job with an economy of colour and form, pared down to quirky lines of shading in light red or a turquoise green spread over these eggshell-coloured canvases done in egg tempera. In *Tapeworm* (2008), some silk-screened black elements are added to the mix, daisy chains of

printed eyes meandering through a field of neatly detonating fireworks. *Interlude* (2008) has red lines radiating upward like spotlights at a Hollywood premiere, against a verdant corduroy sky, the two colours broken up by more silk-screened discs that look like phases of a bunch of broken moons. The paintings also have occasional words scribbled in pencil (for example, 'never tell you' or 'sleep archive') that lead us nowhere in particular, but reward viewers who bother to take a closer look. *Butter My Heart* (2008) is an odd painting covered in homely outlines of wonky diamonds. Collaged on the right side is a small image of an explosion with the typewritten words 'BUTTER MY HEART' running across it. While it did not make any more sense of the painting, I felt that lovely sensation of not knowing what was going on – and gladly not caring. Kaiser has said that he wants his art to be like 'a very nice drug' (a high bar for any art), so that, 'once consumed, the viewer feels amazing yet strange at the same time.' While the contact high from these paintings wasn't debilitating, there was definitely something in them that gave off a fine buzz.

Many of the works that fueled the beginnings of modern art were filled with non-objective moves: lines that spoke to the future; vectors of possibilities and promise. No matter where they were pointing it was always to a better tomorrow. Rather than a rehash of these century-old moves, Kaiser's works have a hopeful charm that still speaks to us now. In the spirit of 'anything is possible', even simple cardboard and paint can be thrown together to create objects that will possibly roam our futures, and hopefully the drugs as well as the art will be very nice.

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