



Susanne Paesler, *o. T. (Untitled)*, ca. 1998, lacquer and foil on aluminum, 59 × 59".

Susanne Paesler

GALERIE BARBARA WEISS

The title of this exhibition was blunt: “Pattern Recognition.” Selected by the gallery together with the curator Tenzing Barshee, the paintings on view sported abstract patterns in the narrow and almost banal sense of the word: stripes, chessboards, rectangles. Dating from the first half of the too-brief career of the Berlin-based painter Susanne Paesler, who died in 2006 at the age of forty-three, these works were made between 1991 and 1998—an interregnum between painting’s comeback of the 1980s and its revival of the 2000s.

Perhaps that interval of diminishing stakes and fading significance allowed for such an idiosyncratic and intriguingly efficient reframing of painting as Paesler’s. She reinterpreted the medium as one of, indeed, pattern recognition. Her paintings may look like abstractions, but they are in fact depictions of found fabrics with abstract designs. Indefinitely repetitive, the decorative diamonds of argyle socks, the plaid from the lining of a Barbour jacket, the squares of a checkered tablecloth, and the like make for motifs that are serial in themselves, so that each picture is of no more than one possible selection of detail. The act of painting becomes a virtually mechanical process—while its products, executed by hand, show glimpses of the human component in inevitable minute deviations and inaccuracies.

Paesler mainly worked in lacquer on aluminum or MDF, creating surfaces that are flat, shiny, and deliberately “cheap.” While in the 2000s certain younger German painters—Sergej Jensen, Stefan Müller, and Thilo Heinzmann come to mind—drew attention to the medium’s tactile and physical aspects by painting, for example, on bleached linen or substituting other fabrics for canvas, Paesler, by contrast, shifted the medium’s emphases in the opposite direction, toward a duplicative picture defined by equivocal openness rather than physical fixity.

The strength of this focus on the primacy of the picture over painting (conceived, needless to say, within the discursive framework of painting) was illustrated with particular clarity by the chronologically last piece in the show, *o. T.* (Untitled), ca. 1998. This is a “remake” of Lucio Fontana’s iconic gashes, cut into a dark-red aluminum “shaped canvas” with rounded corners, successfully imitating even the texture of the support in a pictorial rendition or simulation of the material of painting. In the late 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, Paesler created a number of such works that turned around the principle of pattern recognition and the distancing abstraction it required—and applied it, in a reflexive twist, to the history of (abstract) painting. Re-creating Jackson Pollock’s drips or the gestural-abstract vocabulary of art informel in lacquer on aluminum, she made paintings by painting pictures of painting.

With Paesler’s pseudo-Fontana, the exhibition pointedly stopped at the threshold of the self-referential engagement with the tropes of her medium that the artist would pursue in the 2000s—hinting at what the presentation did not delve into even as it lingered over the early pattern pictures. These representations evince a peculiar worldliness: Each contains within itself a social reality that exists outside painting. The selection of works for the show, one might say, brought painting into view as a vehicle rather than an objective. The exhibition focused on a technique of distancing, on abstract imagemaking and recognizing patterns in the world, and on a specific process of producing pictures and interrogating their facture, rather than on “painting,” with all the baggage that word entails.

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

—Dominikus Müller