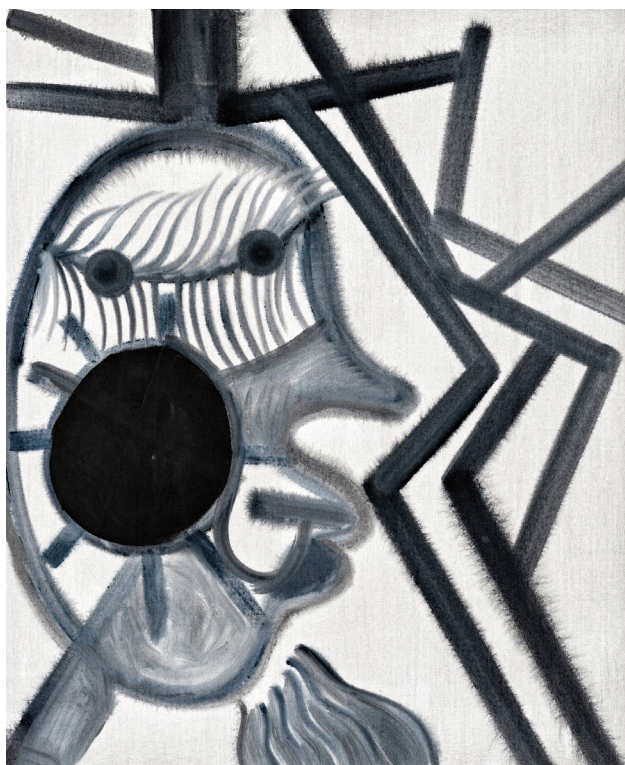


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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Roberta Smith | June 8, 2017



"Untitled (Viennese head)" by Tobias Pils is at the Eva Presenhuber gallery. Tobias Pils, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich

TOBIAS PILS

Through June 17. Eva Presenhuber, 39 Great Jones Street, Manhattan; 212-931-0711, presenhuber.com.

Eva Presenhuber, the powerhouse Zurich gallery, has opened a New York outpost in the beautiful space that Karma, the bookseller and gallery, so fruitfully occupied for four years. The inaugural Presenhuber show is the first New York solo of Tobias Pils, an Austrian painter born in 1971 and an exceptional improviser who uses numerous drawing and painting materials but no color. He sticks exclusively to black and white and the grays that those two can yield. Like many contemporary European painters, he dips into the styles and motifs of modernism's heroic early years. (His fellow travelers include Volker Hüller, Gert and Uwe Tobias, Tal R, Gerwald Rockenschaub and Katharina Wulff.)

Several of Mr. Pils's paintings harbor hints of Matisse-like windows, ferns and patterned textiles. The two faces of "Untitled (rome)" evoke those in Picasso's "Girl Before a Mirror." A stronger work, "Untitled (arrow)," reads as a strenuous distillation of the shrieking woman of "Guernica" — to a stark white geometric shape. The ponderous table-shape and jumble of "Untitled (autumn 2)" could be the mother of all Cubist still lifes, while the buoyant "Untitled (Viennese head)" speaks for generations of cartoonish, possibly hat-wearing noggins from Klee and Chagall forward. Some canvases seem compositionally confused or too tasteful. But the lack of color adds an implicit gravity to Mr. Pils's peregrinations that slows you down, while also making his shifts in techniques and materials especially clear. Even when he doesn't quite pull things off, it's interesting to watch him try.