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ARTS & BOOKS

ON VIEW



Photographs by ANNIE WETTER David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

MARKUS AMM'S densely layered, small-scale paintings on gesso board take on a sculptural presence at David Kordansky Gallery.

Layers of luminosity

BY LEAH OLLMAN

Illusionism in painting is long past being a given, yet there is still something exhilarating about work that breaks the fourth wall and brings us into the game — art that fixes our attention on how it is made, the mechanisms behind its effects.

Markus Amm's recent paintings at David Kordansky Gallery through Saturday, with their luminous layers and crusty edges, incite just such rousing engagement.

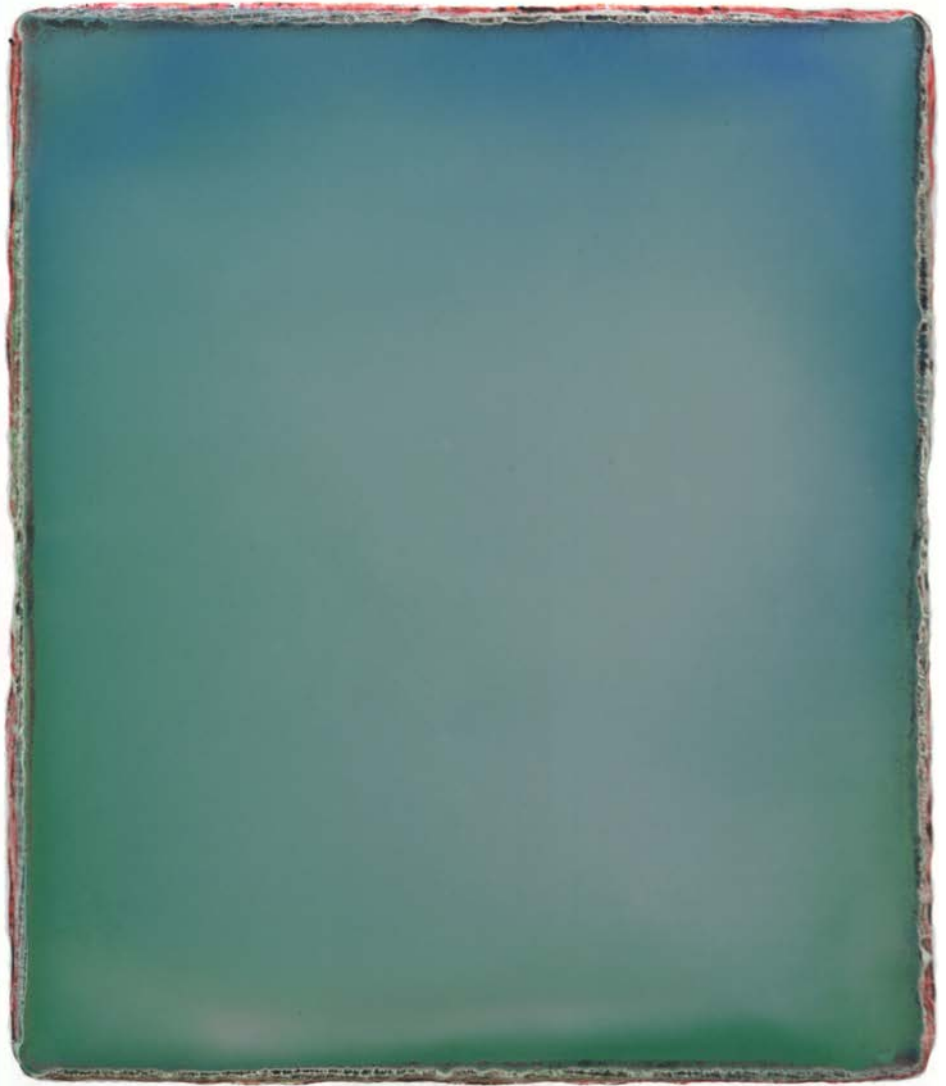
Amm stretches linen over panels and builds up thick, smooth gesso work surfaces. He pours, pulls, spreads and strokes thinned oil paint on top, sometimes sanding between layers. The sense of pictorial space is at once deep, aqueous and nonliteral. Edges where the gesso has accumulated surround the still plane like a rugged shoreline, rimed with color. These paintings have sculptural presence on the wall, and yet they read as internal weather events.

One of the 17 untitled works is predominantly crimson, with gold and green along the sides and a dark dimple that suggests the heart of a blossom, close-up, blurred. The palette smolders.

A gorgeous image of rectangular pools of violet is reminiscent of Rothko. Passages in other works recall the stain paintings of Helen Frankenthaler and the veils of Morris Louis. Some details conjure atmospheric tempests excised from J.M.W. Turner or George Inness. A broad swath of art history is contained in these dense, little panels, from the Romantic Sublime on up.

Amm, who was born in Stuttgart, Germany, and is based in Geneva, creates work that is immersive but not by way of immensity. Some pieces measure an intimate 13 inches by 11 inches. The largest is slightly more than 2 feet in height. Rather than physically enveloping the body, they urge us close, then closer, to marvel at the immediacy and expansiveness of paint.

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AMM'S WORK conjures that of Turner, Rothko and others across the history of art.