

BROOKLYN RAIL

Tobias Pils



Tobias Pils. *Untitled (city)*, 2016. Mixed media on canvas. 202 x 152 cm, 79 1/2 x 59 7/8 inches.

Tobias Pils paints passionately. His exhibition, which inaugurates the gallery's New York space, is made up of mixed media works on canvas that shift between the loosely representational, the fantastic and the utterly abstract—often in a single work. The paintings in this show suggest a serial quality, but they are not so easily characterized.

Vaguely humanoid images emerge in Pils's exuberantly layered canvases, but they never resolve or completely cohere. The Austrian artist's brushwork is stunning: gentle washes rest alongside bold gestural marks. He paints on the floor and composes his pictures with a combination of oil, acrylic, and varnish, which adds energy and tactility to his pieces. The enigmatic and sophisticated mark-making echoes graffiti's staccato pulse while stretching painterly possibilities.

Edges reveal closely focused attention, soft arabesques bleeding into the unprimed raw canvas. The same linen peeks seductively beneath inky patches, or ochre shadow's dirty white expanses. *Untitled (window)* (2016) vibrates with texture—a diaphanous white field next to crackly obsidian stripes, and finally, the surprise of a small, ghostly grey hand. This enigmatic open palm anchors an architectural panel of expressive looking patterns that suggest an open doorway.

Pils restricts his palette to nearly all grey and out of this seemingly limited range he creates infinite shades of grisaille. Blacks range from smoky shadows to infinite darkness. His strongest compositions play with surface, depth, and scale. Biomorphic shapes transmute from flora to arrow, architectural allusions appear, weird shapes suggest off-kilter furniture, and his pared down humans are imbued with humor. *Untitled (figures)* 2016 manages to convey mood with four simple lines depicting a dissatisfied half of a conversant and cubistically simplified genderless couple.

The complex and fascinating *Untitled (City)* (2016) segues from a densely layered interior to abstract linear designs that invites viewer contemplation. Seemingly without any discernible subject matter, the painting can be interpreted as a kind of modernist mandala, or an aerial metropolitan view.

Is it a microcosmic space or pastoral hallucination that inspired *Untitled (flowers)* (2016)? The grey dimensionality breaks to white, suggesting blurred corolla, leaves, and stems. Nature blooms again, echoed in *Untitled(china)* (2016) where a fence of thrusting vines—ethereally brushed tendrils that recall the botanical patterns of German photographer Karl Blossfeldt—is hung adjacent to a real window, framed in white walls and verdant with a bucolic view of climbing ivy.

Rippling with vitality and unexpected iconography, these paintings employ gesture, shape and tonality to inject a bit of whimsicality into a profoundly creative endeavor. The juxtapositions of figure and form are intriguingly integrated, if not always identifiable. These works are conduits of pleasure.