

RAFFI KALENDERIAN

Portraits

4. Nov. - 22. Dec. 2017

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present the fifth solo exhibition of the American artist Raffi Kalenderian. He was born in Los Angeles in 1981 and the Californian metropole is now the centre of his artistic production. Kalenderian's paintings and drawings explore the possibilities of the portrait genre and range between reality and poetic illusion. For the exhibition Kalenderian is presenting a newly created work group consisting of large and medium-format oil paintings on canvas (150 x 122cm, 122 x 91.5cm and 91.5 x 61.5cm) and eleven works on paper (134 x 91.5cm and 71 x 51cm).

Kalenderian's portraits act like windows into his personal microcosm. They create intimate moments between model and artist which include the observer. Friends, family members and people with whom the artist is personally connected but also acquaintances from the creative scene such as musicians, writers and poets are the central protagonists of his interiors, which are very spartan in this new series: a delicate chair, an empty unadorned room, a composition that in its simplicity directs the viewer's curiosity towards the pose of the centrally placed model. Relevant details, such as the floor covered with countless spots of paint in *Erika in the Studio*, but also the consciously arranged carpet, the painted partition screen with the Californian flag in *Emily* create the awareness that these works were created in the studio in the living presence of the models.

At the same time, the artist's great passion for detail can be felt in every corner and on every level of the picture. Kalenderian's compositions are permeated by strong colours and unusual geometrical patterns which attract and repel each other. Busy stripes or checks on the painted fabrics give the artist an instrument for distortion and abstraction. A bright green pattern on the wallpaper, as dominates in *Dasha*, moves into the foreground. In *Shanti* it is the young man's clothing with its extreme focus that stands out from the background. The intense red of his shirt and the navy blue check contrast with the restless structure of the texture, reminiscent of wood, on the wall behind his back. It is an intensive and high-contrast colourfulness that Kalenderian skilfully uses to set off certain colours such as deep red and vibrant white even more intensively, as in *Steven* (see invitation card).

Kalenderian often overpaints existing works then partly scratches off the new layers of paint to allow certain parts of the picture to re-emerge. It is an interplay between pastose overlays, glazes, encaustic elements and erasing existing surfaces. As a result of this the portrayed figures seem to partly dissolve and become one with the background or stand out very strongly from it. The brushwork is lively and strong. Energised curved patterns dissolve in static straight lines. Strongly worked contours fade and fuse with dappled areas of colour.

Despite the insights into the studio space, the eye of the viewer repeatedly turns to the subject's face and explores its physiognomy and facial expression which looks towards the artist in a dreamy, relaxed or sometimes challenging way. Such as in *Alison* who, turned in profile to the viewer, looks out almost suspiciously from the side. In contrast to the usual frugality of props we see here an arrangement of smaller objects on a white-glazed chest of drawers which, with its pastel tones, contrasts strongly with the black of the leather jacket and the austere backward-braided plaits. Kalenderian's faces appear authentic and at the same time mask-like and unfathomable. The people are either integrated or displaced between reality and alienation in the real surroundings of the studio. It is an unconventional style of portraiture which is less concerned with the physicality of the model than with the fragility of the psyche and the relationship between the inner and outer state.

Raffi Kalenderian's work has already been shown at many international solo and group exhibitions in the USA and Europe. In 2016 Kalenderian was part of the exhibition *Painters' Painters* at the Saatchi Gallery in London, UK. In 2010 his works were on show at the *Next Generation* exhibition at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland. Kalenderian graduated in painting from UCLA, California, where he studied under Laura Owens and Yutaka Sone among others. Kalenderian is one of the new generation of young artists from Los Angeles.