

Galerie ISA is delighted to present Antonio Santin's solo exhibition, 'Gravitas'.

Deeply rooted in the tradition of Spanish Tenebrism as well as his own training as a sculptor, Santin juxtaposes flattened planes with tangible forms carved by light and shadow to create a continuous perceptual dialogue in each work. The rug series evolved from his ongoing interest in the opacity of fabric as a device to obscure with abstract patterns and textures. Each of these works brings the background into the foreground while a discernible shape hovers beneath the surface. Alluding to concealed anthropomorphic forms, their sculptural qualities make one question whether his fabricated reality is more real than your own. Much like the Gobelins Manufactory was to luxurious Renaissance tapestries, Santin's approach to his signature trompe l'oeil paintings focus on arresting intricate details and surface textures. Inspired by the unique fusion of Josef Albers sharp and boldly colored squares with the fuzzy, blurred palette of Mark Rothko, Santin subverts the experience of flat color field paintings by 'crumpling' the very view.

Santin gives us beauty, but he also prompts us to consider the underside of beauty, the thoughts or actions we might choose to conceal and present instead a different image to the world. The universal concept of hiding something under a rug needs little introduction and is understood across the globe. It is an image we could describe as belonging to everyone's collective unconscious.

The act of studying a painting intensely forces us to stay focused on the matter at hand - in this case the incredibly ornate rugs that Santin chooses to depict. They are a wonder of creation in themselves, but the paintings the artist produces are so much more than highly proficient re-workings of beautiful things. Santin uses the tropes of art history to situate his paintings in a context that the viewer will immediately - though perhaps subconsciously - associate with high drama: the Baroque era. A Spanish artist based in Madrid, Santin had the Prado and the compelling paintings of the Italian and Spanish Baroque to purloin from when lighting his works. He employs a technique known as Tenebrism which uses especially pronounced chiaroscuro where there are stark contrasts of light and dark and where darkness becomes a dominating part of the image and almost a subject in itself.

Some of the over-arching themes inherent in the Baroque were an attempt to represent infinity; an emphasis on light and its effects; and a focus on the theatrical - all of which we can see at work in Santin's paintings. The blurring of boundaries between painting, sculpture and architecture was also signature to the Baroque movement and we could argue that just as several artists in this period were attracted to working in an interdisciplinary manner, so too is Santin.

While Santin apparently borrows from traditional figurative painting, he also plays into the contemporary arena using subtle devices that are psychologically charged such as the suggestion that there is someone present, but hidden. There is a certain cinematic quality to Santin's work in this respect. We, the viewer feel the weight or importance of something that has existed or still exists, but is now

disguised or waiting to be discovered. This engenders a sense of expectancy but also teeters into the territory of existential crisis.

Santin is an artist who is not only always looking and searching to an almost excruciating degree with his eyes, but also with his heart and inner eye. His works are bursting with a controlled and channeled energy, an awe for beauty but also for the expression of the divine in nature. Beholding Santin's works is to give oneself a moment of joy, contemplation and also challenge: how hard do any of us really look at the world around us? And how many of us take time to be grateful for the journeys our imaginations can lead us on, even for an all too brief moment.

Jane Neal