

Aldo Chaparro and Antonio Santin: "Modelling Matter"

Crossing the boundaries between painting, sculpture and performance is a common contemporary artistic practice – often with stunning results that not only reveal a re-interpretation of form and genre but also puzzle the perception of the viewer and prompt great curiosity about what we see.

Aldo Chaparro's and Antonio Santin's latest works are a case in point. Both artists work across various media and genres and are equally interested in how sculptural characteristics, like the creation of three dimensional elements, perform on a two-dimensional format. From an art historical perspective, such a description alludes to the term *relief*: a sculptural form that is carved from but still belongs to a surface. And indeed, the artworks presented at Galerie Isa could be thought of as contemporary, somewhat abstract reliefs, created through an individual process of modelling plasticity into a two-dimensional surface.

Aldo Chaparro (born 1965, lives and works in Lima, Peru and Mexico City) is a trained sculptor and best known for his distorted stainless steel sculptures. But no matter which type of medium he chooses for his artworks, his practice centers around a process of capturing a moment of the present. He developed a performance-like transformation process in which he unleashes the energy and force from his body onto stainless steel, wood or canvases.

For this exhibition, Chaparro presents two different series of artworks. In the stainless steel sculptures, his working process resembles that of a traditional sculptor, physically engaging with both hands with his material but without any other tool. We see the results of an intuitive process that the artist himself once described as 'half dance, half fight', leaving the traces of an intensely bodily and improvised dialogue between the artist's hands and his material: three dimensional folds of steel that create a landscape of light and shadows, peaks and troughs, tempting the viewer to mirror him or herself in a surface that is only able to reflect a distorted detail.

Chaparro's interest in the interaction of his body, energy and material as a process rather than the urge to depict something that we are familiar with becomes equally apparent in his paintings. In this series of works too, the artist is engaging physically with his material by modelling matter on flats, hereby focusing on the performance of gold leaf to create the illusion of three-dimensionality. The highly dynamic, golden traces on the canvases resemble the leftover contours of his dance with matter on a surface in order to re-create it.

Antonio Santin (born 1978 in Madrid, lives and works in New York) is known for his hyper-realistic, dramatic paintings depicting skillfully executed ornamental tapestries. Whereas Chaparro invokes drama by his immediate and physical interaction with matter, Santin's paintings – including his earlier, large series of portraits – seem to be the results of the forces of light and dark, of the visible and the hidden. Similar to the techniques of *tenebrism* and *chiaroscuro* that the famous painters Caravaggio and da Vinci introduced to European painting in the 15th and 16th century, Santin is able to depict dramatic scenarios not only of human expression but even of textile folds – the latter with a humorous lightness.

In his latest series of paintings, Santin demonstrates how both his painterly and sculptural skills translate into stunning artworks that not merely depict a somewhat uncanny carpet, but an almost abstract relief. His painted carpets are images whose sources are photographs of draped carpets on the floor. They are so richly detailed and lively in color that they first seem like an actual carpet hung on the wall, revealing a world of beautiful patterns and harmony. After that first encounter with the ornamental beauty of the carpet, the viewer experiences a curiosity that is evoked by the folds in the carpet. Is something underneath, did something heavy push from the sides, or are we merely witnessing an innocent moment of halt, a frozen movement of matter?

The depicted carpets with their patterned harmony seem to reach out to the viewer by dramatically raising their surfaces, thereby forming secretive waves and a peculiar dynamic on the flatness of a painting that seems to be part of a larger narrative, a narrative which we will never be fully told by the artist but only by our own imagination.

Both artists model movement in their surfaces, movement that results in a plasticity of matter: Whereas Chaparro captures movement and the energy of a moment to create an abstract relief on a two-dimensional surface, Santin reveals his mastery in oil painting by depicting a painted relief.

Jamila Adeli