

TODAY

Today (online), 11 juillet 2015

Luke Heng's monochrome colour fields evoke a floating timelessness, Bruce Quek

Art review: The Waiting Room

Luke Heng's monochrome colour fields evoke a floating timelessness

SINGAPORE — It is a title that seems to suggest a sense of temporal dislocation as we wait for something important to happen inside blandly institutional settings — a doctor's appointment, a job interview, for instance. But whimsical speculation aside, *The Waiting Room* directly references the time young artist Luke Heng spent allowing his paintings to dry, time spent reflecting on a work's current state and time spent considering his next move. In a nutshell, it evokes the deliberate care that goes into the deceptively simple-looking works in his latest solo exhibition.

Much of the exhibition, in the central room at FOST Gallery, is given over to the near-monochrome colour fields that have come to characterise Heng's practice over the past few years, possessing a frank materiality that finds its way into titles such as *Blue On Blue*, *Blue On White No. 2* and, maybe a little more gnostic, *Blue On White (Delft) No. 3*.

It would be tempting to assume, given such titles, that the range of colours on display might be a little sparse but that would be wrong. For instance, *Blue On Blue* tends towards limpidity, as if one was looking at the bottom of a swimming pool, while *Blue On Blue No. 2* is its polar opposite — an enveloping mass of deep, inky indigo, interrupted by two marks at the bottom edge of the canvas, which resemble the imprint of someone on their knees.

Each of these paintings bears one or more similar marks that stand apart from the dominant gradients of a given painting, which at times seem to beguile the viewer towards some figurative interpretation, given our habit for seeking patterns and stories. Viewed otherwise, they might embody the Japanese aesthetic concept of *wabi sabi* — or perhaps more generally as a sort of visual speed-bump, which enjoins greater care in examining each painting, to the point of perceptual immersion.

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The exhibition also features a relatively recent development in Heng's practice — the use of paraffin wax, a medium he began exploring while on a visual arts residency in Paris last year. The two series in wax, *Monologue 2* and *Chassis*, also share a painterly preoccupation with the conventional form of canvas on a wooden stretcher.

While the practice of examining this common thread through non-traditionally painterly materials is well-worn to the point of cliché, Heng's execution proves refreshing — the dappled, crystalline translucency of paraffin wax, suggesting some frozen, snow-laden fog, seems incongruous in such a regular, rectilinear form.

Even with such uniformity of media, subtle variations in colour are present in each series, affirming a sense of stand-alone individuality amid the harmony of each overall series. Of the two, though, *Chassis* offers significantly more interest, with its formal variations on stretcher bars having that sense of serene relentlessness of Minimalist artwork.

Taken as a whole — particularly in light of the exhibition title's suggestion of spatialising time — the overall impression of the exhibition is one of some sort of floating timelessness, of a moment infinitely subdivided into endless layers of variation: *Limbo* relieved of its onerous associations.

Bruce Quek

The *Waiting Room* runs until July 26 at FOST Gallery, #01-02 1 Lock Road, Gillman Barracks. Free admission.