

THOMAS DUNCAN GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

VERENA DENGLER

AMERICAN PAINTING

May 1 – June 20, 2015

Thomas Duncan Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *American Painting*, Verena Dengler's first solo exhibition in the United States. The exhibition - Dengler's first to be explicitly dedicated to the medium of painting - will be a presentation of works on canvas and paper that explore notions of fragmentation and division.

Dengler's practice has long been concerned with the divide between art and craft and their inherent political and socio-economic associations. *American Painting* is a new step in Dengler's interest in dealing with the fault lines that divide practice and theory, technique and expression, crafts and arts, and cross-genres.

Several of the canvas works are comprised of two main elements: the larger overall composition and a needlepoint composition that has been sewn onto its surface. These smaller, collaged elements are embroideries that the artist hand-stitched before sewing them onto the canvas. For this, Dengler used embroidery canvas, known as Aida cloth, which is a glazed coarse weave with a grid structure. In her book, *Textiles Prozessieren* (2007), author Birgit Schneider traces the central principle of digital technology back to the punch card system invented by Joseph-Marie Jacquard in 1801 for weaving, stating: "The first images that were separated from their body to be processed as codes were fabrics." For Schneider, the origin of digitalization was the "textile-tactile product."

Other works on canvas and paper explore Dengler's relationship to mark making more directly, dovetailing historical and personal lineages of form and text that result in works as cunning as they are visceral.

In relation to Richard Sennett's thoughts on manual labor, Dengler investigates technique as a cultural issue as opposed to a mindless procedure. Specifically, she has been interested in how the label of contemporaneity within art has been diametrically assigned to a detached technological aestheticism or its very counter-reaction: the virtuoso painter. Dengler explores the possibility that these designations might not be mutually exclusive, as today, they are both currently exoticizing "digital native" mentalities.

In *The Craftsman* (2008), Richard Sennett writes: "What exactly is skill? The generic answer is that skill is a trained practice. In this, skill contrasts to the *coup de foudre*, the sudden inspiration. The lure of inspiration lies in part in the conviction that raw talent can take the place of training. We should be suspicious of claims for innate, untrained talent. 'I could write a good novel if only I had the time,' or 'If only I could pull myself together' is usually a narcissist's fantasy. Going over an action again and again, by contrast, enables self-criticism." Sennett also points out that the word "virtuoso" in the mid-eighteenth century simply meant an amateur with a lively curiosity.

Verena Dengler (born 1981) lives and works in Vienna. Previous exhibitions include New Museum, New York; Galerie Meyer Kainer, Vienna (solo); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; Austrian Cultural Forum New York; MAK Galerie, Vienna (solo); mumok, Vienna (solo); Greene Naftali, New York; Metro Pictures, New York; 21er Haus, Vienna; Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf; Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich.

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