

# Inside Out

Paul Rodgers / 9W

Marin Kline and Melissa Kretschmer

Curated by Barbara Rose

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Both Kline and Kretschmer are abstract artists who use beeswax as a medium to create highly variegated and textured surfaces. Their approaches to materials and processes are vastly different, but both accept and accommodate chance and accident as central elements in image making. At the same time, without recourse to geometry, each creates stable structures that acknowledge the intrinsic horizontality and verticality of the pictorial field.

Each has developed a singular and highly original method for turning images “inside out”, i.e. reversing the traditional procedure of layering paint on top of canvas. Melissa Kretschmer digs into the surfaces of sheets of laminated plywood, revealing the flat planes underneath at various levels of depth, and then filling in the fissures with colored wax that creates bands of light. Their dense tactile surfaces and fine detail depend on visible manual labor and ask for close observation to be fully experienced.

Martin Kline typically uses a wood panel as a support for his layers of richly built up and intensely colored encaustic, whose surfaces often suggested bark or natural or cellular occlusions. However, in his recent paintings, which use linen as opposed to wood as a support and might better be described as encaustic in linen, Kline builds on his previous investigations of the relationship between surface and support, image and edge. These paintings are related to the issue of an “inside out” reversal in that the encaustic permeates the cloth support.

According to Rose, the work of Kline and Kretschmer represents an intense focus on the inherent properties of materials and provide a fresh approach to technique that is the antidote to the quickly executed, instantly consumed, mass produced abstraction currently fashionable. Their emphasis on the time consuming manual effort necessary to create their work is an essential part of its content.

Kline uses wax more extensively than Kretschmer as an expressive medium with specific properties. He builds space that hovers between the support and the surface whereas Kretschmer builds a space between the surface plane and the foundation plane on top of which the subsequent layers are laminated. For both of these artists the space is not illusionistic but physical.

The critical focus on the materiality of painting, which is the relationship between pigment and what contains it, was first carried out by the French group known as Supports/Surfaces. Both Kline and Kretschmer concentrate on this relationship, but define materiality in different ways, exposing the relationship between the inside and outside of the painted surface. Kline integrates materials seeping in from the obverse of his recent paintings on linen with subsequent spills and pours on the surface. The result is a mysterious hovering space that combines thinner and thicker pigment and its residue. Kretschmer excavates the interior space of laminated shallow layers in a process of revelation related to the way photography develops images that emerge from thin sheets of paper.

In her catalogue essay, Rose explains that Kline and Kretschmer belong to a small but growing group of artists analyzing the constituents of the pictorial in order to define the essence of the medium and isolate what remains viable in the ancient medium to create a fresh synthesis that can carry painting forward as a serious and expressive art form. Their individual personal analyses of the fundamental constituent elements that are the irreducible essence of the art of painting—space, light, color and surface—is a thorough rethinking of its premises in terms of what remains that can be built upon without repeating the illusionism that characterizes academic art. At the same time, their refusal to use the superficial reproductive techniques of postmodernism sets their work apart and relates its aims and purposes, although not its materials and practices, to the masters of the New York School who redefined painting. Their works are clearly handmade, but the gesture of the “hand” is not present as it is in gestural painting. Because there are no individual brush strokes visible, their work of both is perceived as a unitary gestalt as opposed to elements that relate to or echo each other as in traditional composition. Their emphasis on tactility and detail separates their work from both Greenberg’s exclusively optical art as well as from the exclusively literal reading of minimal art that rejected painting for three-dimensional objects.

New works by Martin Kline and Melissa Kretschmer will be seen in PAINTING AFTER POSTMODERNISM, a group show of six American and six Belgian painters to open in September in Brussels, Belgium.