

Alex Ruthner  
*Ferien*

18 March – 16 April 2016

Vernissage: Thu, 17 March, 6 – 8 pm

Opening hours: Wed – Fri 11 am – 6 pm,

Sat 11 am – 5 pm and by appointment

Alex Ruthner has always found novels, magazines, films and the internet rich in inspirational material for his visual inventions. Moreover, his works are replete with foreign objects in a manner reminiscent of the layering of a palimpsest: a white square on a blue background, a dead straight vertical axis emitting black-coloured clouds to the left – it looks as if the visual elements have been copied and pasted in. The new works by Alex Ruthner can be read as pictorial narratives requiring investigative work to be understood, as minimalist impressions of nature, or as montages of signs or gestures resembling scribbled paper bearing splashes of paint due to being left around the studio floor: what counts lies in between.

It is this ambivalence, this oscillation between abstraction and figuration, this blend of various pictorial layers – think icons on a computer desktop or app icons on a smartphone – that gives Alex Ruthner's work such iridescence and multiperspectivity, creating a visual polyphony in which quotes from pop culture, contemporary fashion iconography and art-historical representational traditions enter into morganatic unions.

While Ruthner's early paintings were frequently "all overs", seemingly almost bursting from a surfeit of colours and shapes and incorporating (as Max Henry has put it) "pictures within pictures", this latest group of works bearing the title *Ferien* (Holiday) is markedly restrained in terms of its media and representational modes. The artist has stated that the title signifies not so much a holiday as a state of absence and of existential borderlessness. This "I am away"-ness can refer just as much to physical absence as to mental disassociation from the image and experience overkill, which (over)determines contemporary life settings.

A base coat of colour imparts atmosphere and tone – various blends of blue, grey or green. The figurations in the form of fine lines and discreet hatching have dissipated to such an extent that they can only be surmised as contours; the pop quotes have largely disappeared. In complete contrast to the brightly coloured, happy tumult of holiday snaps populating Facebook or Instagram, these *Ferien* works have the character of a visual sparseness – a wasting away, even – both in terms of colour saturation and use of pictorial space. It's more *Holidays in Cambodia* by the Dead Kennedys than *Holiday in the Sun*. A stylised nature becomes the hallucinatory foil to the boredom one senses when confronted with the virtual scenarios of present-day digital existence plateaus.

Alex Ruthner's latest works, which, because he is always reworking them, can only ever be regarded as temporary settings, can be read as implicitly critiquing the "short attention span" images of a post-historical visual borderlessness – a translation of all that is fleeting and disposable into the more durable medium of painting.

Borrowing from Erik Satie's concept of *musique d'ameublement*, however, they could also be designated as "peinture d'ameublement": pictures that are simply there without imposing themselves

on us, that help create an atmosphere without dominating it, that tell of things left unsaid without formulating a narrative – art as ontological *dérives* through answerless space.

Text: Thomas Miessgang

Alex Ruthner (\*1982, Vienna) lives and works in Vienna and Los Angeles. He studied under Albert Oehlen at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and under Daniel Richter and Peter Kogler at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Alex Ruthner's works have been seen in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including in *Fix*, Millbank, London (2014); *Unreliable Imitation of Life*, Ibid, London (2014); *Alexander Ruthner*, kunstbuero, Vienna (2014); *Nature of Speed*, Gallery Exit, Hong Kong (2013); *Parallel Vienna 2013*, Vienna (2013); *Brucennial 2012*, New York (2012) and *Living and working in Vienna 3*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2010).