

Jeff Kowatch, Carnavals
Muriel de Crayencour
November 24th, 2016

Jeff Kowatch's paintings explode off the walls of Galerie Faider. The American artist's Apocalyptic Carnival series launches him into an exploration of the carnival and circus worlds, in a vision that resonates with art history and the work of James Ensor, among others.

We encounter a giant canvas, measuring 15 by 8 feet, a profusion of colored circles, overlaying one another, fuzzy and vibrant, like cells simultaneously individualized and amalgamated. They are clumped densely, like a gathering, or a troupe. There are many reds and a few white, green and yellow spots. This is Christ Leaving Brussels. That's right, leaving, in a scene-reversal of Ensor's Christ's Entry Into Brussels. The title says it all. Behind the jubilant colors, everything is haywire, Christ has skipped town, there's nothing left to save. And yet its beauty remains, infinite and undeniable. Behind this departed presence lies a trace of what once was, and behind the depicted scene lies the backstage.

Jeff Kowatch creates his paintings by laying down between 50 and 100 layers of paint. He begins this process by preparing the surface patiently until the linen weave is no longer visible. Next come the colors, in defined zones, round, organic shapes, and bubbles, each holding a story now erased, because the artist sands each layer of paint and adds another tint afterwards. This process is infinitely slow, because he uses oil paint that takes several weeks to dry, and it produces an extraordinary final result: the color is at once dense and transparent, melting, fuzzy, powdered and radiant. The extremely smooth surface offers its viewer a hugely sensual experience. This paint is not dead, but present, intense and primal, with an incredibly contemporary quality. It's a dose of happiness.

Jeff Kowatch is an American artist, born in 1965 in Los Angeles. He has lived in Belgium for around ten years. As Kowatch explains in Conversation avec Paul Emond, "the carnival, the circus and painting are all likewise perceived as archaic, considered as activities in decline, or perhaps even completely dead. These parallels interest me, and this series examines their other similarities. In this sense, I approach a broad range of notions, such as renaissance, self-sacrifice, fascination with death and the search for paradise lost and time" (Editions Tandem).

Looking further into the exhibition, we find smaller-format paintings, where his children are the subjects. They, too, remain hidden behind the color combinations, tucked away beneath the multiple sanding treatments, body and soul brought together, united, condensed by the process. A delight!

Jeff Kowatch
Apocalyptic Carnival
Galerie Faider,
12 rue Faider
1060, Brussels.
Until December 18th.
Wednesday to Saturday, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Also Sunday December 19th
www.galeriefaider.be