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Tim Braden

Making Abstract Paintings

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What is an abstract painting? Aren't all paintings inherently abstract to begin with - in the sense that a painting is always a derivative of reality, a representation in simulated shapes and colours, a series of brushstrokes on a flat surface? In his third solo exhibition at Juliette Jongma Gallery, Tim Braden explores what it means to make abstract paintings. In his attempt to understand them, he decided first to paint existing abstract paintings in situ. The first works he made were views of abstract paintings in the studio of the English painter Patrick Heron (*The First Studio*, 2012). As a sixteen year old, Braden visited his studio in Cornwall and this made such a big impression on him that he applied to art school soon after, encouraged by Heron himself. "*By remaking existing work, I tried to understand the process of making something abstract, and shake off the need for some idea of realism, and thus be freer with my work*", said Braden.

Initially, the new paintings of Tim Braden seem quite a big departure from the mostly figurative work he has been making in the past. However, there are certain themes that run throughout his work that can also be identified in his new abstract work. Some of his earlier works deal explicitly with colour, abstract design, and the process of painting or making things, which also was the subject of his previous exhibition in the gallery, called '*Paleis van Decoratie*'. In a way the new group work can be seen as a continuation of this exhibition. Just as Braden treats a piece of fabric or floral wallpaper in his figurative paintings with equal consideration and attention to detail as the spatial environment in which it is located, and thus nullifies the distinction between foreground and background, he now rubs out the differences between figuration and abstraction with the same flat and colourful brushstrokes.

The small abstract compositions on card are in fact fragments of interiors: the corner of a room, the hem of a curtain, or the edge of a rug. In the larger paintings Braden goes a step further and zooms in on a specific element or detail in such a way that they lose context and contours and become unrecognizable, literally non-figurative. Even though some of these paintings are quite large, Braden considers them '*studies*' or '*research paintings*'. They are explorations of colour, of isolated forms in a flat plane, of the effect on the retina of the juxtaposition of pure colours - but not in a dry, scientific sense, for that matter Braden paints with too much flair and virtuosity. His new series of abstract paintings can rather be seen as a celebration of the freedom of paint on canvas.

Nina Folkersma  
Curator and art critic