

## Katherina Olschbaur: Paintings, 2016

Katherina Olschbaur's art undertakes a critical examination of the contemporary political situation broadly conceived and the "disintegrative" processes that define it. As she has remarked, the waning of formerly entrenched structures, reinforced by the ascent of social media, "has set in motion a dynamic development that is fraught with strong emotions" and even causes a positively physical anxiety: "The ground one walks on is squishy; there is no structure; bodies are present and yet not."<sup>1</sup>

Olschbaur has devised a way to articulate this phenomenology in her paintings without relying on a spectacular and illustrative iconography. On the contrary, the sense of profound irritation, of staring into an abyss, conveyed by her highly diverse compositions grows out of the intensity of her engagement with the precarious quality of painterly form itself, an unfathomable dynamic interplay between flatness and sculptural definition, between surface and depth, between circumscribed bodies and their diffuse decomposition as they pass over into color and linear figuration. Yet Olschbaur leaves nothing to chance or to the potential pathos of spontaneous gesture; her complex interpenetrations of fragile systems are carefully orchestrated. She builds spaces that fall in upon themselves; constructs perspectives that are anchored in diverging vantage points and ultimately become lost in uncertainty; develops ostensibly significant formal elements only to discard them again in a kind of parody.

Some of these elements seem to consist of hard and solid materials, while others are light and translucent. Olschbaur pits them against each other or lets them play to elicit subtle chromatic accents. What was firm then sometimes undergoes transmutation into soft textures; bulging figurations and others that appear to be turned inside out are an implicit reference to the support medium, the canvas itself, spurring a reflection on the status of the picture as object.

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<sup>1</sup>Katherina Olschbaur in conversation with the author, January 2016.

Katherina Olschbaur's pictures blend material sensuality with the vulnerability of the body; not least because of the fragmentary elements in her compositions, this peculiar quality looms in them as an amalgam of trepidation and pleasure. "Sometimes," she notes, "the body's presence is only felt, in a blank."<sup>2</sup>

Silvia Eiblmayr

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<sup>2</sup>Katherina Olschbaur, personal note, 2016.