

The Allover Paintings of Martin Kline

Throughout the course of his career Martin Kline has examined systems of historicism and presentation with a focused and disciplined approach creating bodies of works in series. Each of these has their distinctive visual language. For his third solo exhibition at the gallery, the artist presents his newest group of works entitled *Allover Paintings*. Among his many investigations Kline has looked into notions of authenticity, sincerity and originality.

In 2007, Kline paid homage to the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock by throwing encaustic paint onto a surface resulting in a black, white and silver chromed composition entitled *Dream of Pollock (for Kirk Varnedoe)*. The tribute stopped at the random process and palette as Kline favored his own signature material *de rigueur*, encaustic, over Pollock's industrial enamel oil paint, and opted for a wood panel support instead of canvas. This choice had purpose. The panel was constructed with a framed edge, adding dimension to and containment of the splashes and drips. More importantly, its rigidity permitted the more orderly and heavily textured surfaces for which Kline is known, morphing and expanding from the center over the splattered frenetic loose entanglements. *Dream of Pollock* is a deliberate reference melding into Kline's autographic gestures of built-up surfaces resulting in a heightened physicality that is sculptural. Thereafter, Kline moved on to explore other processes in painting (as well as cast metal sculpture), refining his technique and testing the properties and possibilities of the pigmented wax material. His approach widely varied and ongoing in his investigation of the medium. Among these explorations were the building up of sculptural surfaces with the use of a paintbrush, pushing encaustic through the weave of canvases from behind and creating pieces to use in the manner of collage. These forays resulted in cohesively developed series of works with their own style and identifiable traits, such as the structured additive *Blooms*, the white Belgian linen *Tabula Rasa* paintings and the prolific *Hammocks* series. Shadow also plays a crucial role in Kline's output. He has described it as a medium in and of itself.

Last year Kline revisited the automatist theme in a bolder drip and pour technique. Beginning with the palette from his *Dreams of Venice* paintings, the *Allover* series developed into a group of multi-colored, strictly monochromatic abstractions. Gone are the compositional focal points experienced in his *Blooms* or the narrative entry points characteristic of the *Hammock* assemblages. In these new paintings, thick and thin rivulets, thread-like flicked markings and skeins of encaustic interweave with broader poured pools of color. These wider calligraphic-like gestures are reminiscent of demi-lunes, koi fish or other quasi-biomorphic forms. Kline was a grant recipient for a residency in Japan in 2005, an experience that was to inform his artmaking. While he largely focused on direct drawing with black oilstick on canvas incorporating Japanese cultural motifs, he also studied the art of calligraphy, its rhythms and compositions, the slowing down and focus the technique requires. He states, "With calligraphy you have to concentrate, be in a zone, you can't take it back." These strategic pours are juxtaposed with seemingly more chaotic and random drizzles looping on themselves, offering a contrast, a push and pull between the meditative and the emotive. The paintings are not merely monochromatic optical fields of encaustic webs or meshes, there is a distinction between line, bands of color and ground.

Kline is utilizing Pollock's spontaneous technique but also shares his approach to painting horizontally largely because of the constraints of the encaustic medium. A paintbrush loaded with encaustic will escape from the brush if held upright. Kline has worked horizontally, typically on a tabletop for his entire oeuvre. His earlier ink and watercolor *Grids* dating back to the 1990s and his additive encaustic paintings have necessitated a horizontal positioning because the pull of gravity fastens the pigments *in situ* while drying. For the most part, Kline's hand has had a direct touch through the use of a paintbrush on the paper, panel or canvas. In these *Allover* paintings Kline is still working horizontally but he has severed the traditional anatomical connection, distancing himself from the surface even more by placing the panels on the floor to start the paintings. This increased space between the tips of his brushes and the pour from the cans relinquishes control and allows for randomness and elements of surprise to occur. The expanded room for automatism in the process is reflected in the abstraction. Without having identifiable compositional centers on which to converge, the viewer's eye has more autonomy to wander all over the painted surface and engage with it indiscriminately. In the absence of a frame confining the edges – in most but not all works – the panel sides are clean and free of paint and suggest that the drips and calligraphic gestures travel beyond the picture plane. It is as if the viewer is getting a snapshot, a window into elements that exist outside the painting's boundaries. Conversely, some of the panels have splashed sides, demonstrating the process and imply that the action might even continue onto the back of a work. The painted sides also accentuate the panel as an object, a sculptural entity that amplifies the physicality of encaustic paint.

Kline has enjoyed a prolific artistic career creating a continuum of output drawing from a wealth of historical sources, including his own works. This fluid, more improvised approach to painting will surely foretell and influence future series.

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