

REGEN PROJECTS

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Reviews

LOS ANGELES

Sergej Jensen REGEN PROJECTS

In the decade since his star turn in Yilmaz Dziewior's "*Formalismus: Moderne Kunst, heute*" (Formalism: Modern Art, Today) at the Kunstverein Hamburg in 2004, Sergej Jensen has only consolidated his claim on post-Conceptual painting. The "paintings without paint" that first garnered attention—compositions found and nominated as much as made (from fabrics dyed, stitched, or repurposed)—are asubjective, if startlingly aesthetic, pictorial manifestations that embrace all manner of supports as incidental images and substrates. With these works, Jensen has occupied various spaces within the gallery, from fresh-primed rooms to a storage unit at Galerie Neu in Berlin; he kept a normally hidden freight-elevator door uncovered and cracks in the walls exposed at the newly minted White Cube space at Mason's Yard in London. He has also been known to take the residue of past installations as givens, making use of lighting or architecture keyed to previous occupants; his snarky sewn money bags and pieces with actual bills stuck to them, meanwhile, register a proleptic approach on another level. Which is to say that Jensen's acting on painting takes place both within the frame's physical edges and without, alluding to the installation site as well as to the art object's broader conditions of circulation.

This makes Jensen's marked turn in the past couple of years to engaging the materiality of paint more prominently (and letting the materiality of the support literally fade into the background) all the more compelling, since this would seem to insist on the viability of the actual act of painting as a critical practice. His presentation at Regen Projects, the artist's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, amounted to a quasi-retrospective comprising pieces from the past ten years, in which Jensen incorporated the weathered scraps and mottled fabrics that have long been his signature alongside older pieces that he restretched, and thus "remade," for this show, as well as several new works. One painting, *Untitled*, 2007/2013, offered glimpses of its wooden armature through pulled-taut patches of cotton. For another, *Untitled*, 2013, Jensen mounted a smaller panel (copiously painted, by the artist's standards, with colors slathered onto and soaking into its fraying patchwork of hemp) onto a much larger, neutral canvas stretched for the occasion. Other new works that register his conspicuous engagement of pigment ranged from the odd optical monochrome *Cheddar*, 2013, a long, horizontal surface that Jensen covered in soft-yellow pastel in the week preceding the opening, and which persisted in a sunny if vaguely noxious haze, to the figurative "Acrylic Paintings," 2012–13, for which he appropriated imagery from the paintings of Théodore Chassériau, a lesser-known student of Ingres. In this series, frantic strokes and facture-laden fields are cobbled together much like the piecework fabric in *Factory*, 2012–13, and so many others.

To be sure, the revelation of Jensen's Regen Projects show was the ease with which these oddly expressionistic works coexisted with paint-



View of "Sergej Jensen," 2013. From left: *Acrylic Painting*, 2013; *Untitled*, 2012/2013; *Untitled*, 2013.

less trials such as *End of Society 2008*, 2003/2013, a polyester scrim with two ovoid stickers (neon-orange tent-repair patches, which here instead puncture a unified raspberry field). Jensen's romance with facture conjures the corporeal nature of painting, just as does his reliance on the surface as a collection of scarred remnants. His work has, in fact, always been startlingly animate in its presence (possibly as a result of the fabrics' prior lives) and is rife with evocations of skin. The gorgeous green copper resinate covering *Untitled*, 2012/2013, is marred by gruesome sutures, stitches that suggest flayed and rejoined flesh more than they do craftwork. This campy, Frankensteinian figure all too easily brings to mind chestnuts about canvas corpses or a dead medium, and indeed Jensen's whole practice might be posturing as one big ruse. Yet the steadfastness of his attention to painting and the capaciousness of his results betray a seriousness of purpose that portends much more to come.

—Suzanne Hudson