

REGEN PROJECTS

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ARTFORUM

FLORENCE

Silke Otto-Knapp

MUSEO MARINO MARINI

Silke Otto-Knapp is a painter, and, as Matisse wrote, "A painter doesn't see everything that he has put in his painting. It is other people who find these treasures in it, one by one, and the richer a painting is in surprises of this sort, in treasures, the greater its author." Indeed, Otto-Knapp's solo show "Cold Climate" demonstrated that the closer viewers got and the more they concentrated on the works, the more they discovered a series of thoughts about the richness of the pictorial medium. The exhibition presented a selection of seven canvases painted in watercolor and gouache, set on freestanding mobile structures. The works are of similar size and their subjects are taken from the grand story of early-twentieth-century dance, including such milestones as *The Rite of Spring* (choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky, music by Igor Stravinsky) and *Parade* (choreography by Léonide Massine, music by Erik Satie, costumes and set by Pablo Picasso, scenario and libretto by Jean Cocteau). They are either theatrical landscapes within which the corps de ballet moves (*Rite of Spring*) (all works cited, 2013) or empty sets (*Stage with Shooting Stars*). Yet there is little emphasis on the weight of historical reference or quotation, for the experience the artist proposes plays out entirely on the level of the visual and often physical sensations that the paintings trigger.

Though the paintings are based on found images, the transfer is made without technical mediation; it is done simply by eye, as a line drawing. This outline is then elaborated with sponges and loaded brushes; blurred, nearly grisaille, of an almost alabaster transparency, the decorative and design elements come to the fore. A multiplicity of gestures is thus superimposed on the canvas. This process is fundamental to the choice of the exhibition's title, which is borrowed from one of the short prose poems in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*. (The text of "Cold Climate" in full: "A season in yellow sold extra strings makes lying places.") Otto-Knapp thus makes reference to a writer who, through a deconstruction of vocabulary, syntax, and discursive practice, fundamentally redefined language, piece by piece. And the artist deconstructs painting similarly, stripping it of every normative element, shucking its literary subjects as if she were photographing a photograph and then arranging it on a pedestal (an operation with which Medardo Rosso was quite familiar).

Occupying the space and taking its measure, rather than being exiled to its walls, the paintings established a meaningful relationship with



View of "Silke Otto-Knapp," 2014.

their context. But the exhibition also called for them to become, in turn, a theatrical setting for three actions by artists who interacted with the paintings in nondidactic terms. For the opening, Ei Arakawa invited dancers from the Halau Hula O Na Mele 'Aina O Hawai'i dancing school in New York; subsequently there was a sound-installation performance by Sergei Tcherepnin, and Karl Holmqvist performed a sound piece.

Since its opening in 1988, this museum has transformed a former medieval church dedicated to San Pancrazio (where, in the late-fifteenth century, Leon Battista Alberti had created a chapel for the Rucellai family) into an exhibition space that allows visitors to "walk around" the sculpture of the Tuscan master Marino Marini, contemplating it in ever-varied perspectives and with unusual juxtapositions. Allowing the same circumambulatory view of her canvases, Otto-Knapp seemed to suggest a possible dialogue between painting and sculpture, one that she has resolved in advance by charging the liquid surfaces of her canvases with an infinity of gestures.

—Paola Nicolin

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.