

SERGEJ JENSEN *Sergej Jensen*

by *Linnea Kniaz*

ANTON KERN GALLERY | JANUARY 20 — FEBRUARY 25, 2012

In his third solo exhibition at Anton Kern Gallery, Sergej Jensen mediates between disparate forces in such a way that the resultant fine-tuned choreography moves not as a breeze or gale, but rather as a multifaceted cyclone. In tandem with a new and unexpected fervor, Jensen's characteristic tranquility directs the viewing experience with greater authority than it would given over to either extreme. His earlier work, made predominantly of found and purchased fabrics stitched or patched together, delineated a steady midpoint between the artist's sensibilities and his given circumstances. These recently completed paintings demonstrate those delineations with gumption. Jensen has challenged his role as arbitrator.



Although at times exercising austere—but not self-righteous—deliberation when unceremoniously sewing a regal yellow silk puzzle piece or Garfield's docile tail onto patched-together soiled linen, Jensen now amplifies his use of paint, introducing a romantic instinct successfully balanced by his well-practiced self-effacing attitude. Isolated, turbulent strokes drowning in molasses-toned oil ironically result from solid forms painted on the versos of stretched linen. Black, tar-like grime on whispering, earthy surfaces is the modest effect of industrial acrylic paint applied to dyed linen. While suggesting an expansive, honeysuckle-pink landscape, a burning soot-gray abyss, or a menacing natural disaster, Jensen hinders any potential for calculated charade through his elusive and understated process, wherein he relinquishes control to the animated paint and sculptural fabrics.



Jensen's ability to negotiate such incongruent effects—sensuality and subtlety—is best expressed in two paintings from 2011 that both depict a figure on hands and knees, painted in black, red, and white through the back of the burlap or linen support. The figure's drained stance and brutal execution—paint oozes to the front of the surface from behind, forming abrasive strokes and bulbous, pulp-like masses—evokes Delacroix's "Death of Desdemona" (1858), with its directional, airy marks that when layered simultaneously imply weight. Like Delacroix's melodramatic scene carried out with immediacy and no heavy-handed veiling of materials, Jensen's painting seems to be fact, its drama inborn.

It is easy—and a pleasure—to get swept up in the resounding pulse of this exhibition's mellifluous colors, the varying surface dimensions and the suppleness of paint, fabric, and pastel. But it is the sewn outline of a square crawling off the edge of a painting, the exposed linen on the edge of a blue painted surface, a scanty hole, or a slightly imperfect rectangular frame—or, rather, the fact that we notice these seemingly minor notations—that defines the purpose of Jensen's poise. He navigates between extremes to avoid unnecessary distractions, instead achieving perfect pitch.