

# ARTFORUM

## CRITICS' PICKS

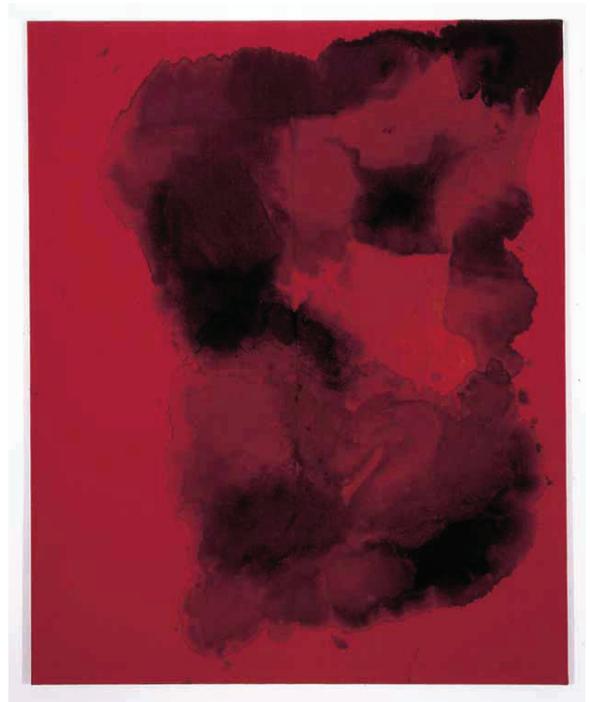
### Sergej Jensen

**Malmö Konsthall**  
**St Johannesgatan 7, Box 17 127**  
**September 4-November 2**

This exhibition of over forty paintings describes Sergej Jensen's prodigious range, from tonic ink bleeds to abstract motifs of iron-on patches, Color Field painting to Op art, and Blinky Palermo to Jasper Johns. Sensuous depth alternates with conceptual remove in paradoxically delicate and rough-and-tumble paintings made with unprimed canvas, jute, money bags, metallic mesh, accidental stains, purposeful tears, and needles and thread. What makes Jensen's paintings disarming, however, is not the heterogeneity of their means or references, but rather the stately indifference with which the artist employs them. A few inconspicuous bleach stains transform one small, dun-colored canvas into a reticent landscape; a polyhedron of gouache lends unprimed linen a dimension belied by the diffidence of the gesture. In Jensen's work, effects vastly outstrip the effort: Thus *Du und Ich (You and I)*, 2003, a brume of black ink over a throbbing fuchsia ground, seems to owe everything to the drama of its materials—and very little to the gesture that united them. On the other hand, the charged materials of *Tower of Nothing*, 2004, a pyramid of empty money bags tacked to the canvas, and *Untitled*, 2007, with a thousand-deutsche-mark note glued to the surface, are so direct in their indictment of painting's cash-cow status as to undermine any real criticality; instead, the money bags' grimy fabric and the bill's aesthetic detail merge with Jensen's other eloquent and banal ingredients.

Many of Jensen's effects—spills and scuffs and tears—hinge on accident, such that Jensen's "hand" might be better described as a fortuitous hands-off. That so much presence, let alone so much twentieth-century art history, should be marshaled by these minimal gestures makes for a disconcerting imbalance. To distill the vast cultural effort that climaxed in modernist abstraction into such effortless paintings seems almost offensive. Fortunately, these paintings are just as effortless to admire.

—Joanna Fiduccia



**Sergej Jensen, *Du und Ich (You and I)*, 2003 watercolor, vegetable and fruit juice and dissolved coal on linen, 68 7/8 x 55 1/8"**