

ARTFORUM

New York

Sergej Jensen

ANTON KERN GALLERY

532 West 20th Street

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Berlin-based artist Sergej Jensen's works will disappoint viewers looking for visual bombast, but by avoiding heroic painterly gestures (and frequently even forsaking the use of paint) Jensen has nevertheless become one of the most interesting painters working today. His works are mostly medium-size panels of unprimed stretched canvas, linen, or wool, daubed with chlorine, bleach, and dye and/or adorned with bits of fabric. Jensen's compositions would seem unresolved or even incomplete were it not for their intuitive elegance: That he often minimized the physical work necessary to produce his paintings belies the mental effort it takes to create such apparently slapdash beauty. For his New York solo debut, Jensen even outsourced some of the labor to his mother.

Paint or no paint, however, the show was emphatically titled "Paintings," and Jensen's use of found materials, his low-key, washy palette, and his attempts to downplay his own role in the creative process all have a painterly pedigree: One might cite Michael Krebber, Rosemarie Trockel, Richard Tuttle, Blinky Palermo, or Sigmar Polke as precedents. The show's subtitle, "I come from the computer," printed three times on a letter-sized piece of paper taped to a wall near the entrance, acted both as a biographical key (Jensen's mother is a retired computer programmer) and, in its self-effacement, a declaration of principle.

Two works hanging near the gallery entrance nicely encapsulate many of Jensen's key concerns. *Untitled (Binary One)* and *Untitled (Binary Zero)* (all works 2005) feature bills in various currencies (arrayed in the vertical bar and vertically orientated rectangle implied by the titles) affixed to two different types of raw canvas. (The checklist identifies the medium as "money on canvas," perhaps a jab at the status of painting in an overheated market.) Here, economy (as in finance) is crossed with the economy of Jensen's gesture. It is easy to envision these bills as creatively repurposed remnants of international travel and to imagine Jensen making money by selling it. The bills themselves are arranged visually, and the color combinations are surprisingly appealing, rescuing the works from being mere illustrations of an idea.

Some canvases in the show, such as one covered with pink-and-white star-shaped patches or two works made of dyed burlap, miss their mark and seem to have neither a clear animating impulse nor enough visual allure to distract us from the lack thereof. But when Jensen strikes the right balance and appeals to both eye and mind, he comes up with works like *Untitled*, in which a pale stain on an



unaltered bolt of fabric becomes a motif repeated in five horizontal bands- a ghostly conflation of Christopher Wool's all-over decorative patterning and Agnes Martin's ethereal horizon lines. Wool is also a touchstone for *Silver Laser Flowers*, which uses four fragments of a floral-print fabric found on the artist's last trip to New York; Jensen has affixed them to canvas like remnants unearthed at an archaeological dig, leaving the viewer to complete the pattern around them. These works, like the "Binary" paintings, encourage an appreciation of the finished object and consideration of how it came into being. The most recent work in the show is made from the offcut residua of its companions in the gallery. The environmentalist mantra "reduce, reuse, recycle," enlivened by the element of chance describes not only this painting but also Jensen's humble yet expansive practice as a whole.

—Brian Sholis