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Tschüss

In the end, the question is always: where to begin. In the case of Malte Zenses' paintings, it starts with the material ground, i.e. with preparing the canvases with rabbit-skin glue or gesso for the subsequent layers of colour, screen printing and collaged elements. They are nourished by material that has been condensed in research and needs the right frame to become image and painting.

The presentation at Liste Art Fair Basel is the final part of a trilogy that began in Mexico City and is now being continued in Switzerland via Munich. The visual link between the presentations is thin metal sheets mounted on the walls as a background for Zenses' paintings. In Mexico City, they were metal sheets used to enclose construction sites and that bear traces of repeated use in the streets; in Basel, they are metal sheets that bear the traces of the opening evening in the courtyard of Sperling's gallery. In both cases, we look at random markings, but from very different contexts, and yes, the associated questions of value between the street and the art market are part of it.

This brings us to the frame that Malte Zenses sets for this group of paintings: 'poor', because random forms of expression (the imprints, colour residues, inscriptions or scratch marks on the metal sheets), which come into the world for accidental reasons and only become the object of observation by context. The background noise (involuntary mark-making as in scribbles, tags or children's drawings) moves to the foreground. Linked to this is the question of when a mark becomes an expression and expression takes on a form, i.e. the old question of point of origin and intention.

At the bottom of the paintings we find short sentences such as 'It's not much, but please take it', 'But kindness makes it everything', or 'But your mother's taste was questionable'. They are text fragments from Hollywood children's films, from Cinderella to Robin Hood: parables about (the unequal distribution of) wealth and poverty, about milieu and class (and the hope to climb the 'social ladder' – thanks to the fairy godmother for that), and about what is really important in life, such as empathy, love and generosity. These are films about the illusion that the world is good or will change for the better. Escapist fairy tales, in other words. Reality is rarely so beautiful. The fact that children are nevertheless fed these illusions better not make us cynical.

If we understand painting as a way of thinking about the world, then the question quickly arises as to which idea of the world should be given expression. The above fantasies or the real abysses? How much of the world can painting even take? Perhaps rather erase what demands visibility too vehemently? Would it be better to concentrate on the essentials? And what is that anyway? In this reflection on its own possibilities, painting is not a naive form of being disconnected, but a cautious testing of its capacity. *It's not much – but please take it.* Enough for today.

Patrizia Dander, May 2025