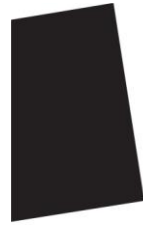


Essay: Sacha Craddock Rene Daniels and Karin Ruggaber



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Opening times

Mon - Sat, 11:00 - 18:00

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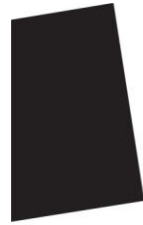
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London, EC2A 1HD

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The work in this exhibition was made around the middle to late 1980's, the most recent paintings made just before Daniëls' artistic career was brought to an abrupt halt when he suffered a brain aneurysm in 1987. He was 37 then and has not been able to work since.

The relaxed nature of the painting, combined with the fact that the artist has not been able to produce more, makes it possible to appreciate this as fresh material rather than evidence of a continuing career. Although the notion of timelessness in painting is a bit hard to sustain, the tendency to hold art still in the concrete of instant history can also suffocate possibilities and comprehension. Although included in the groundbreaking exhibition *Zeitgeist* in Berlin in 1982, Daniëls' work did not ever really seem part of the more grandiose painterly stance at that time. His light, sometimes funny, almost perfunctory painting style carries conveys a different atmosphere. Working from the assumption that paint is there to produce image, not the other way round, his attitude encourages active participation.

The work continues to influence many contemporary painters and can also be seen as part of a direct line of European art, which from Picabia through to Sigmar Polke, carries a consciousness of the role of the artist, and therefore of an art work within the art world. An ability to merge so much potential within a light and playful surface, however, comes out of a secure understanding of the role of art itself and the active assumption that painting can be a metaphorical place for thought and possibility.

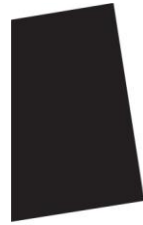


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René Daniëls' painting literally opens up the possibility of space within the surface of the painting. This geometric play with illusion, where the shape shifts backwards and forwards between spatial illusion and regular motif, does in its very simple way bridge abstract and illusory space. The spaces, suspended rooms, or perhaps gallery spaces without paintings, float as if the world is turned in on itself. Somehow the subject remains on the surface while the direction shifts back through illusory space. He worked with this concept, drawing it over and over again until the motif becomes short hand. The opaque Das Haas with its translucent surface further complicates a sense of promise, a vision beyond. Daniëls' makes space, suggests incident, for instance a bullfight, a map or landscape, but always leaves the door open for the image to shift as it functions.

The surface of *Painting in Unknown Languages* (1985) is not over kempt or over tended; the painting is rough, choppy, fluid and yet light. It seems to breathe, as the artist readjusts the focus and yet, as with all paintings, the sense is never one of completion.

The *Lentebloesem* paintings naturally set up an immediate recognition, a confident reference to Van Gogh and Mondrian, and therefore to all Dutch painting. Here the iconic signs for art spaces have been replaced by their titles in writing. The relation between the verbal and the visual is married easily, illuminated literally. Words become blossom and the other way around and yet the object is never one of straightforward reading. In *Kades - Kaden* (1987) the words, mere notes or sounds that contribute to the illusion itself, are difficult to make out. Another has words in Swahili. In their non-linear relationships, the words form concrete tufts or sprouted buds which burst in three-dimensional relation to each other. Diagrams, in a way, all the paintings carry an off hand, drawn, generosity, and a sense of promise when seen from far away. It is strangely difficult to make the transition from drawing to painting, and yet Daniëls' drawing within the painting builds a confident relationship to, and subsequent distance from, the image.



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The practice of painting has moved so fast, so far, from an over exaggerated polarization between abstract content and representational function. By encapsulating both considerations Daniëls renders the division dead and can be seen as a kind of painter's painter for indicating a direction in which painting can go. He uses space to make place but the places remain strangely empty. The space is there, instead, to reflect on the role of art and therefore its relation to life. This is an old approach, one in which the allusion becomes the illusion and the room, or the 'bow tie' motif becomes shorthand for exactly that kind of transitional play with thought. Instead of the representation of attitude Daniëls carries within this work the timeless nature of questioning. This kind of space is purely in the head. The style of the painting; tough, delicate, off hand without attention to surface or volume, guarantees the method is very much part of the message. The tangible relationship between the touch of paint and an artist's intention provides a fundamental key to understanding painting which goes way past discussions of beauty, colour, or even subject.

Sacha Craddock



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