

Jean-François Lauda

Jean-François Lauda's paintings almost collapse into nothingness, his impressions of form and traces of process yielding atmospheres without populace. He cycles through tools and materials, building a timeline rather than a spatial framework. However, the viewer's implicit communion with the work not only prescribes an investment of time, but also, in Lauda's words, "an environment of cohabitation." One is met with harmony and discord within the same picture plane, the latter supplying an encounter with the limits of tolerance. Evaluating each painting generates a profoundly new experience, "like reading between the lines" instead of sticking to the script. Previous appraisals of Lauda's work have thus invoked the indeterminacy of his compositions. The obscured traces of his marks elide concrete resolution.

"One builds on ruins," Per Kirkeby ruminates. It is within the rubble he describes that Lauda's alchemy is at its apex. Primary intentions give way to process, as beauty is weakened by the primacy of structure. Kirkeby composes by alternating "between premeditated interventions which nearly always go under." He contends that under the influence of time and procedure, "the right structure slowly emerges from the picture." Building on top of collapse is inscribed with an effort to mediate disorder. Lauda emphasizes that he is "always inspired by the possibilities of media," leveraging his tools to contend with crumbling foundations.

Lauda wanders through his process freely, sans dogma, into the open air playing field of trial and error. His structures are born from an internal world in collaboration with the active experience of applying materials to surfaces. After some preliminary moves, the paintings start to gain traction. A direction emerges from the abyss of intuition and the compositions become strange objects instilled with their own autonomies. Mistakes are accumulated and repaired repeatedly until something substantial blossoms and a resolution manifests itself. Such problem solving drives Lauda back to the studio day after day. These paintings bear the consistent threat of collapse, at times taking a wrong direction and residin there. Each canvas is a house of cards where the liberty to make moves is weighed against material constraints.

He's compelled by the absurdity of building a tactile language that can't be found elsewhere. Much like writing, the painter enlists history and conventional understanding alongside moments of divine inspiration. Though largely insoluble, his practice is somewhat identifiable as the contemporary lovechild of Minimalism and Abstraction. An emphasis on line persists throughout the work, though Lauda diverges from artists like Agnes Martin or Piet Mondrian on the level of precision. Forgone boundaries elicit an exploratory aspect, a specific freedom in abandoning the conventional fidelity.

The three large scale works on view inherit the language of Lauda's watercolors. The transmutation of intimacy is perverted by scale as the protracted territories offer more ground for action. A direct point of view is impossible... there's just too much surface. One must instead enter the paintings over and over again, appraising the expansive terrain of gestures and abrasions. Lauda implements windows in the form of paintings-within-paintings to a

kaleidoscopic effect. His edges are active borders as most of the compositional surfaces are framed by paint like loosely rendered trompe l'oeils.

One of the large untitled works is somewhat halved between turquoise oil and white acrylic, though Lauda insists that the split is not calculated, as “an exact half is so violent and intense.” Without a plan this composition “grew out of control,” leaving him to grapple with its incidents. As the turquoise encroaches upon the white, inflections of green and yellow emerge from below as remnants of the underpainting. The oil and acrylic composition allows for two paintings to exist within a single frame. Lauda’s process of oil painting is largely concerned with subtraction and “going under” as the slow dry time allows for extended intervention. Acrylic, on the other hand, is more of an accumulative endeavor. The push and pull of these mediums presents Lauda with two different time zones to work within.

In a 2016 conversation with Terry Winters, Richard Aldrich professed that the artist's latest paintings “really seem musical,” and went on to describe how the conditions of a recording space - from the placement of the mic to the size of the room - are of direct consequence to the nature of the audio, “those kinds of spatial dynamics are a lot of what makes up recording.” He then compares the process to Winters’s production, pointing out “the hazy way the point floats around the objects in your paintings makes me think of that air. It holds and affects all the forms that are floating across the surface.”

Winters identifies this body of work as “a series of accumulations,” and that in the act of composing an image, “there’s a correspondence,” an “adjusting [of] channels.” The artist charts his way through the composition by collecting data that can be “fed into the painting's feedback loop.” Lauda picks up on the tension between impromptu decisions and an active geometrical process. His pilings and scrapings compete for the composition’s surface in an exchange of application and demolition.

— Reilly Davidson











