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Of This Time Of That Place: Ted Gahl Paintings

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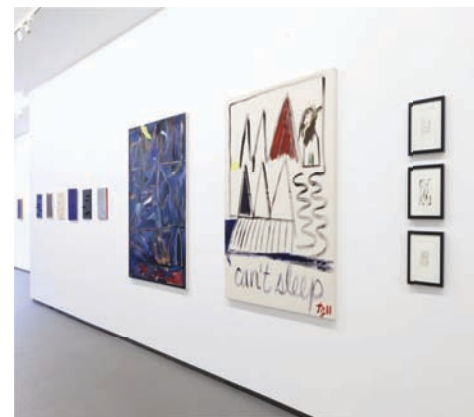
There is something so incredibly evocative about the night. It is a time where I feel most alive. And where visually things get a bit fuzzy: images are distilled, contrasts heightened, and silhouettes stand in for bodies. After sundown, we face the remains of the day— and as Robert Creeley once said all that is left are “some echoes, little pieces, falling, a dust.” These words resonate strongly with the recent show of Ted Gahl’s paintings at DODGEgallery. The exhibit, entitled Night Painter, is Gahl’s first solo show with the gallery. Gahl paints at night and this body of work is homage. Using a palette of deep blues, soft grays, and sensuous pinks, Gahl captures the essence of night. Towing a line between figuration and abstraction, he manages to isolate fluid gestures with an effervescent brushstroke that is delicate, romantic, but not self-indulgent. His images lie somewhere between a memory and direct observation, as they dissolve into an unrecognizable residue. He employs a variety of materials, working in an intuitive, instinctual manner. The more impressive paintings bear a flat, thin application of paint that capture flickering flecks of pinky-orange peeking through large dark areas of deep blue. The show is made up of mostly small, intimate works with a few larger paintings that elucidate his propensity to spread paint with grand sweeps. These works hit me in familiar places, a sort of déjà vu, reawakening past sensations buried within time and memory.

This show is not just about painting at night, but also the experience of night as a muse, a place, a state of mind. In this sense, these works are about solitude and observation. He works in a straightforward manner, the marks are alive, and sometimes only faintly there. But the affect is intense. We find ourselves swept up in an abstracted nocturne that sweetly lulls us and simultaneously enlivening our senses. At night – time seems a little slower, more distilled, and refined. Themes aptly suited to the nature of painting. In this sense, Gahl is also a painter’s painter. Each work professing paintings capacity to capture an evocation of space and the embodiment of time. Yet, Gahl is not without his sense of humor. One work figures a few HB pencils in a row. Using a black on grey palette, this work illustrationally captures 3 pencil forms. Awkward, painterly and ominous this work meets Guston’s humor with a moody awareness of painting about painting. One painting entitled I Can’t Sleep is a bold work that is bereft of the washy paint handling, but iconic in its use of language. Black script of the title forms the basis of this unprimed canvas-cum billboard that announces the artist’s insomnia. And throughout the show a recurring motif are sails or triangular shapes acting as sails, which capture a sense of freedom, yet melancholia – which is also the sister of night.

The most exhilarating thing about Gahl’s work is that the way the image is painted and the way in which it is represented, both share say in the game. His process is naked and stripped bare, allowing it to be beautifully open. This body of work is wholly aware of the many masks that reality takes and sensually palpable in an age increasingly removed from its sense of being here now.



Ted Gahl, Night Painter, installation, October 2011. Photo Credit: Carly Gaebe. Courtesy of DODGEgallery.



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