

Leipziger

Ulf Puder

Kavi Gupta Gallery

835 West Washington, Chicago, IL 60607

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In his second solo exhibition with Kavi Gupta, Ulf Puder continues with his motif of geometric forms rendered in a dark but colorful palette. Puder is of a generation of artists born in the height of the Cold War later to emerge as a defining school of new German painting. Along with Neo Rauch and others who attended Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst, Puder and his comrades from East Germany have mixed tenets of Socialist Realism with abstraction, each in their own way.

Neo Rauch, the undisputed star of the Leipzig School, blends figuration and realism into moments of abstraction with references to comics and printed posters; the effect is an absurd almost comical dance. Puder is at the opposite end: spare images of architectural elements devoid of all life, human or otherwise. It's surreal, but in an ominous, disturbing manner, playing Giorgio di Chirico to Rauch's Salvador Dali.

Puder displays an incredible skill with handling paint that betrays a sense of ease. Like other members of the Leipzig school, Puder makes paintings that hover between abstraction and representation. *Hub* (all works 2008) for instance appears to be a composition of jagged planes taking on three-dimensional form. Slowly it becomes apparent that some sort of church-like steeple has collapsed amidst two segments of expressway. But these structures appear more like the geometric vectors seen in 3-D computer games, not in real life. The hazy atmosphere lends a sense of infinite desolation in all directions. It is at this point where the paintings take on a dreamlike quality. Not so much a nightmare, but the sort that leaves you uneasy all day.

This sensation of calm disorder is felt even more in paintings like *Rückbau* and *Verwerfung*. In *Rückbau*, or "decommissioning," two trailers or mobile homes are seen just as a blast of wind strikes them, just beginning to knock them apart. The image of atomic blast waves hitting homes in stock footage also is in the back of your mind when you look at it. In *Verwerfung*, "warp," a church again appears below the gap in a lofty expressway. A recurring dream? This time a stray subway car is barreling along, about to topple onto the building. Both of these paintings are dynamic compositions depicting moments of extreme action and potential destruction. They have absolutely no sense of motion, however. Far from implying something having taken place before what we are seeing and implying that something will take place after this instance, these paintings suggest that this moment is timeless. It always has, and always will be in this position. This is what entices the viewer to stand before it contemplating the scene.

In other paintings stillness becomes animated. *Mobilien* depicts two houseboat-like structures. The sharp angles of the composition are dynamic here too, but there is no indication that a climactic motion is frozen. Have these buildings settled at uneven keels, or are they delicately bobbing up and down? Conversely, the title suggests they can go anywhere, meaning "movables," although they seem content right where they are. *Mondsege*, "moon sailing," again has a title that implies doing while the subject is simply being. Harsh angles make for a vibrant arrangement of elements in an image depicting trailer-type structures that appear to have been long abandoned and have fallen into disuse. Unlike *Verwerfung* and *Rückbau*, where a dynamic action is halted, *Mondsege* is the dynamism of inaction. It is almost a picture of years of dilapidation condensed into a single moment.

Finally, paintings like *Wagenburg* embody a calmness that buzzes with atmospheric perception, the way in the day's first light everything seems teeming with an almost tangible sense of life. All these works contain the dichotomy of a gloom and contentment in their subjects and the manner in which they are rendered.

—Erik Wenzel

(top image: Ulf Puder. *Mondsege*, 2008. Oil on linen. 80" x 83" Image courtesy of Kavi Gupta Gallery.)