

Fluid Forms and Shifting Identities In Lucas Kaiser's Playful Yet Uncanny Paintings

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The paintings of Lucas Kaiser traverse the fluid territories of figuration and abstraction, creating arrangements that give human presence both the sense of familiarity and the strangeness of the uncanny. His figures, frequently void of telling characteristics, occupy a space that resists conventional representation emphasizing motion, shape and the play of density over specific stories. These bodies, torn or blurry, are in a state of change — between being unified and coming undone, as if they resist fixed identity.

At the heart of Kaiser's practice is an interest in silhouette and spatial ambiguity. His figures don't just occupy time; they twist and distort it. At times his optical illusions on his two dimensional surfaces draw the viewer into a world that feels almost real, then suddenly squashes the illusion with bold shapes and a stark color palette. This visual interplay creates an unsettling tension when looked at, underlining an experience which is an active process rather than something passive for the viewers' eyes.



Lucas Kaiser, Gleaming Garden Grape Harvest, 2024, pencil, pigment, watercolor, oil stick on paper, 76 x 56 cm,

photo Björn Siebert

His visual language relies heavily on repetition. Limbs, torsos and fragmented body parts reach across various works underscoring a rhythmic sensibility that overpass the limits of its physical form. These recurring motifs do not imply individuality but act as emblems of movement and change. Color in his work is judiciously calibrated — from muted, earthy tones to forty mixed, synthetic shades. This interaction amplifies the duality in his work: organic and synthetic, intimate and alienated. In other parts, the luminosity suggests a momentary state, almost as if the light is sliding over the figures, but shadows and contrasts pulling them back into obscurity. Never simply decorative, his colors are structural, highlighting depth, stirring atmosphere and mood.

Kaiser's work is playful yet also solemn, often interrogating the viewer's game of reality. His figures have an air of somehow weightless quality, almost in a liminal zone existing somewhere between the physical and the virtual. They might be digital avatars, advertising silhouettes or subconscious remembrances — nods toward a contemporary visual culture filled with temporary images. This intentional vagueness teased at the viewer, and he didn't let his compositions settle all in one place.

In the end, Kaiser's practice is also a meditation on the fluidity of form, identity and perception. His pictures don't provide clear answers but encourage the viewer to inhabit the space where presence and absence, depth and flatness, movement and stillness exist together. This gives his work an instinctive resonance — a sense of reaching, in part, toward something that's not visible, that's constantly in flux.



Lucas Kaiser, Raking, pencil & pigment, on paper, 76 x 56 cm, 2023, Photo: Björn Siebert

Can you tell us about the process of making your work?

Usually each work is planned quite carefully through a couple of sketches. Since the relation between different layers and components are essential for the calculated effect I want the work to have, it is important to have quite a clear idea what is going on where in the picture before I start to work on the actual thing. The process follows mostly a dynamic that starts with the detailed parts and steers step by step towards the rougher areas. That's the way that keeps me most obsessed and concentrated and also has some technical reasons. This difference in working modes is also reflected by a successful finished work, since this dynamic is important to manipulate the viewers perception and offers a certain visual structure that more or less aims to choreograph the viewing process.

How would you define your work in a few words (ideally in 3 words)?

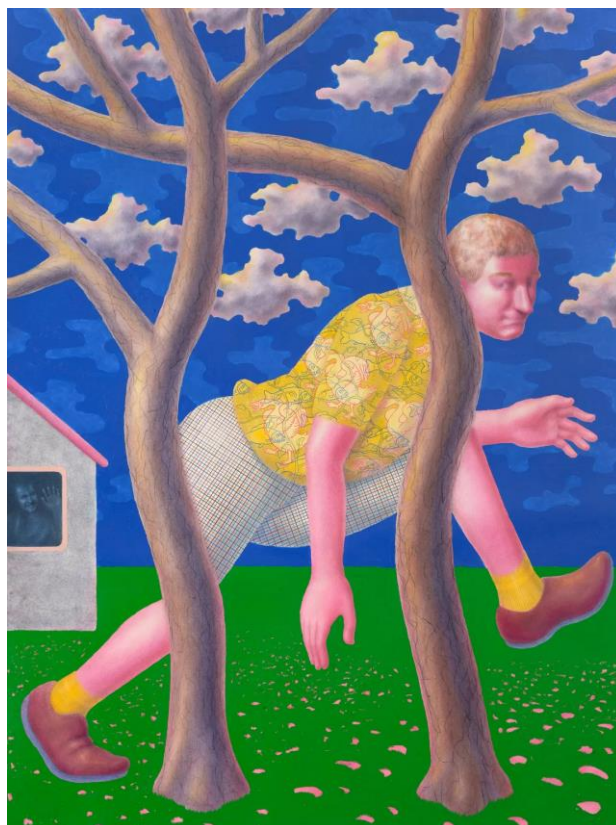
Uncanny Valley, Ideal vs Abyss (dialectical unification or sth like that..), Simulation.

Could you share with us some insights on your new work named 'Two Trees Wide Sky' (2024)? Is there any particular story behind this new painting?

The overall theme (contentwise) is a banal idea of the idyll/ideal landscape. The figure is taking a walk, but like all my figures it doesn't have an agenda. I wanted to make a sky that consists of an almost cruel pattern and a lawn that is very empty. Also the trees are a bit cruel. They are tearing the figure apart. But only on a pictorial level. The idea of walking and the suggestion of movement with a simultaneous stiffness was also sth, I wanted to depict. The little house with the waving figure is a contrast to the other figure and exists in its own space. It communicates with the viewer more directly and is like a reflection of the person that stands in front of the painting, since the main element (the walking figure) is between the viewer and the small figure in the house, who are both more actively watching each other or the walking figure.

Your works often include recurring characters and symbolic overtones. How do these reflect either personal or universal stories, and what influences shape their presence across your body of work?

The figures are an attempt to visualize ambivalences that create certain conflicting sensations. Its a little bit like the opposite of the back figures by Caspar David Friedrich that invite you to immerse yourself in the simulation of the landscape. I want my figures to be confrontational. Not by being explicitly provocative but by aiming creating a barrier of empathy, that suggests the possibility of identification without really allowing it. They are the anatomical representation of a human, but they do not refer to sth specific. They produce only themselves (in a single work but also through separate paintings. I want to create a self-referential circle of symbols/depictions that doesn't lead anywhere but expose methods of creating illusions or conveying information through visual stimulation.



Lucas Kaiser, Two Trees Wide Sky, 2024, pencil, pigment, oil stick on paper, 130 x 100 cm, photo Björn Siebert

There is almost an emotional undertone in your work that is very much enhanced through the play between surreal forms and more familiar motifs. What emotional responses do you want to generate in your viewers, and how do you create this balance between ambiguity and relatability?

That is an observation, I am quite happy with. These conflicting pairs are very important for me. One of my main goals is to create work that is alluring and repulsive at the same time, since that is the kind of work by other artist that I enjoy the most (also movies and literature). I want to deny the viewer to find the perfect “position/distance” in relation to my work. Both in a literal sense by layering compositions and different levels of detail (the viewer has to zoom in and out/step closer and backup to get an authentic perception) and in a figurative sense by trying to unify the ideal/banal/seductive with the uncomfortable/explicit/cruel. Some of my strategies for that are:

- Repetition (sucking meaning out of content)
- Patterns (Pleasant for the eye but degrading for the single shape)
- Layering (Diffusion of attention)
- Illusionism/trompe l’oeil vs plain shapes (inviting the viewer into a “space”and pushing him/her out again)

- Vague Figures with no specific origin/reference (possible but not necessary influences: computer avatars, advertisement, display dummies/dolls, painted figures between 14th and 19th century, etc.)
- Synthetic Realism (combining different methods of depiction into one cohesive work)

Looking ten years ahead, how do you see your practice evolving? Is there something specific-material, technique, theme-you hope to explore in upcoming work.

I want to do larger works and I am slowly working towards that. Maybe I will have to work on canvas more. Also I want my works to become more universal and more specific at the same time. Also I want to think more about the exhibition space and how to manipulate the atmosphere of it.

The bold use of colors like yellow, purple, and red fills the composition. How do you choose your palette, and with what emotions or ideas do you try to invoke such deliberate choices?

I feel like these colors have kind of an artificial but also moody connotation, which I like. Also I want the colours to have an immediate effect. Sometimes I want the colors to contradict the content in a way.

The surreal and multilayered nature of your works invites diverse interpretations. How important is the viewer's active role in constructing the meaning of your art, and how do you design your works to foster this engagement?

Very important. I think, I mentioned a couple of things above. I actually try to steer the viewer around through different tricks, because I want my paintings to be an experience for the viewer. But besides the manipulation of the viewers perception not a singular meaning that is the exclusively right one I only try to come up with strategies to enhance the density of the experience and push the viewer into an approximate direction of sensation and themes.

What about the place where you work? What's your studio space look like?

I moved to a very beautiful space in the centre of Leipzig last summer. I share a big space with garden access with a fellow painter (Max Hechinger), whose work I value very much and with whom I can talk very productively about art and other things. Sometimes its a little bit chaotic especially when I am in a bit of a working frenzy but after phases like that I usually am able to make order again.

The space is also big enough to host a horror movie club there with beamer and couches etc. I run the club with another friend of mine and recently we watched Messiah of Evil from 1973 there, which might become one of my favourite movies.

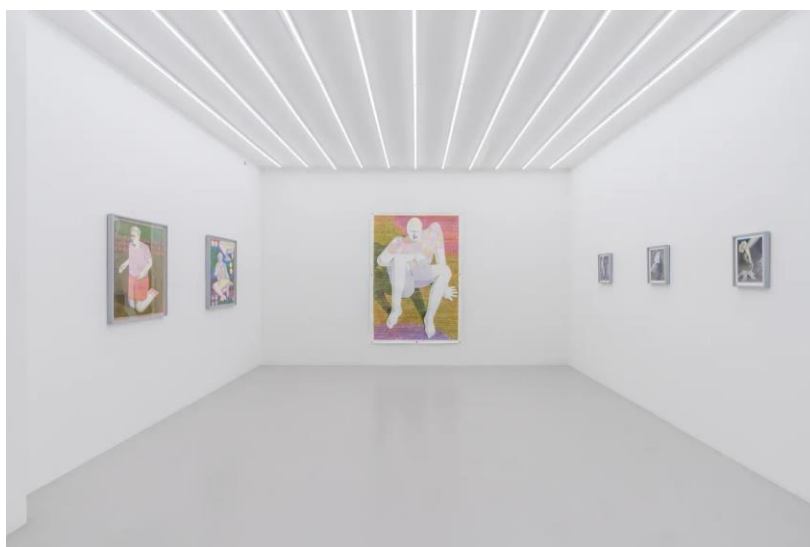
Which are your plans for the near future?

Currently I am working on a show that will deal more with interior spaces and the omnipresence of pictures. I am also exploring the epoch of German Biedermeier/Restoration (1815-1848) for visual source material and for content input I am moving between the concept of Romantic Irony by Friedrich Schlegel and Baudrillard's simulation ideas.

The show will take place late April in Seoul at the Gallery ThisWeekendRoom. I work with them since early 2023 and I am really looking forward to going back there:)



Lucas Kaiser, Coastal-environment, 2023, pencil, pigment, powder & oil stick on paper, 76 x 56 cm, Photo dotgain.info



Lucas Kaiser, Exhibition View, Down at the Green Meadow, 2023, at ThisWeekendRoom, Seoul, Courtesy ThisWeekendRoom



Lucas Kaiser, Morning View, 2024, pencil, & oil stick on paper, 95 x 65 cm, photo: dotgain.info



Lucas Kaiser, Campfire, pencil oil stick & pigment on paper, 76 x 56 cm, 2023



Lucas Kaiser, Pear Picker Trunk Rest, 2024, pencil, pigment, oil stick on paper, 130 x 100 cm, photo Björn Siebert

All images courtesy of the artist

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(https://art-verge.com/fluid-forms-and-shifting-identities-in-lucas-kaisers-playful-yet-uncanny-paintings/?fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZWOCMTEAAaYXncr8uN0pXXBLcrbix5rFS1YRiM1S1bZ5EHLKNnt1xPbjlNKBqkUFmiQ_aem_fxjftZwfZiA5q4lcCk5_kA)