

Cornelia Baltes Shows Us How To Play Among Paintings

Martin Herbert | Reviews | 10 May 2021 | ArtReview

According to the exhibition checklist, Cornelia Baltes's *Eigenbrötler* (or 'Loner') comprises eight paintings – some on the wall, some suspended and double-sided – and three murals; but actually navigating it gives you the impression of being in the midst of one big, spatialised painting. The German-born, Slade-educated artist's aesthetic is outwardly reductive, favouring restful, slow-modulating colour gradients topped with thick, confident, almost cartoonish gestural marks that can recall closeup scribbles or, more fancily, high modernism. You'll glimpse allusions here to Robert



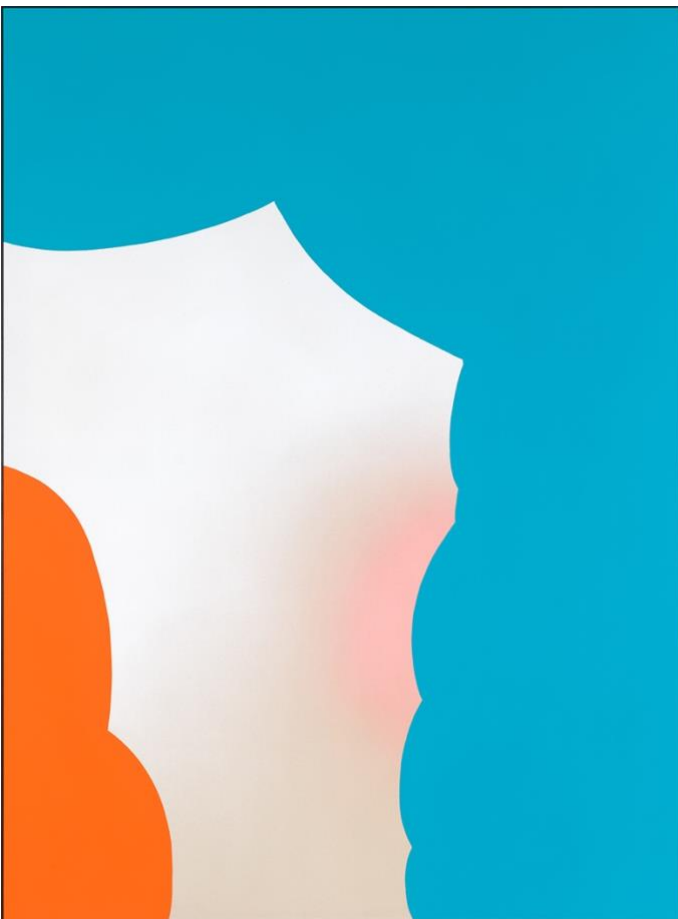
Eigenbrötler, 2021 (installation view). Courtesy Eigen + Art Lab, Berlin

Looking around, you see colours and forms continually articulated and then picked up elsewhere, winking across the room, usually a little tweaked in transit. The white-and-yellow palette broadly recurs in a painting tucked round the corner, whose addition of a thickly black-lined squiggle in turn recurs, modulated, in other canvases. Head to a far corner of the second room and look back, and the space turns into a minisymphony of cool blues and juicy oranges. Individually the canvases are enjoyable enough in a quick-hit way, a melange of high abstraction and Pop minimalism. But it's when you feel like you're composing yourself – taking a step to the left or right, backward or forwards, so a new set of planes aligns and the colours high-five each other – that they take off. In this manner, Baltes manages to fold relational art and the networked painting that peaked a decade ago into her taxonomy of styles. It's not the most taxing approach in the world but it's not lightweight either, just easeful and exceptionally convivial, and at this present juncture, a balm. Before you know it, you're out on the floor, doing her dance.

Cornelia Baltes: Eigenbrötler at Eigen + Art Lab, Berlin, 5 March – 10 April

First published in the April 2021 issue of ArtReview

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Mina, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 230 x 170 cm. Courtesy the artist and Eigen + Art Lab, Berlin

Motherwell's midcentury *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* canvases and, in the opening painting – an obliquely semicircular form in Persian blue cradled in an elbow of pink – to Ellsworth Kelly. But that painting sits against a larger abstract mural, a buttery expanse of unmodulated yellow upon white, the contours of which line up with shapes in the painting, making it clear that Baltes is proposing a playful conversation between pictorial elements, and questioning where a painting might end, or not end.