

BERLIN

Caleb Considine

GALERIE BUCHHOLZ

The eight small paintings in Caleb Considine's exhibition "Cancelled" might at first have seemed a bit lost in the gallery's spacious rooms, but they gradually made their presence felt. The generally pale colors—attaining, here and there, a passing luminosity—lent them a dreamlike pellucidity, but also conveyed a sense of determined and prosaic effort. Considine's art bespeaks genuine devotion to painterly subtlety: Though his craftsmanship was evident, the work was the opposite of mere technical display and razzle-dazzle.



It also took the viewer a while to understand that the irreducible heterogeneity of Considine's subject matter was part of its point. Despite providing glimpses of shared thematic concerns, each painting tended to establish its own context. What the works had in common was that they were all based on the artist's own immediate visual experience: Considine paints real scenes—for the portraits, he uses models—and never works from photographs. For example, *Trestle* (all works 2017), the only exterior view in the show, depicts a section of a subway bridge that the artist, who lives in New York, passes on his daily journey to the studio. The rigorously exact observation suggests a snapshot, but in other respects the complex composition is not exactly "realistic." A wan, directionless light fills the space, and the ensemble of verdigris-riveted steel struts, a piece of brick wall in the foreground on the left, and the bundle of cables winding between them seems to grow more compact toward the rear: Considine has constructed a theatrical space that blocks the beholder's gaze and ultimately reveals a vacancy. This is an inspired depiction of a non-place, a pure scene of transit.

Pigs blood for a painting I didn't make and *Uzumaki/Jarritos* focus on the artist's studio and the creative work that goes on in it. In the latter, a bottle of the famous coffee-colored Mexican soft drink and, behind it, books stacked up on a table or arranged on shelves feature in a composition that retains *Trestle*'s sculptural quality as well as its strangely barred aspect. The title refers to Junji Ito's horror-mystery manga *Uzumaki* (Spiral), of which Considine is a fan. A copy sits atop the stack in the foreground, slyly introducing a dark undercurrent that, contained within the motif of the book, is here left entirely to the imagination. The abject is more tangible in *Pigs blood*, whose title makes it altogether explicit. It shows a covered plastic bowl—a stirrer resting on the lid makes for a prominent diagonal—filled with blood the artist bought from a neighborhood butcher shop, planning to pour it over a ceramic figurine (modeled on a Dalí) that he was then going to paint.

But the complicated scheme came to nothing, and Considine instead painted the blood in Tupperware in a corner of his refrigerator. Toward the bottom edge, the fridge is stained with what appears to be hot sauce, the liquid providing a well-placed anchor for the viewer's gaze, which might otherwise lose its way in the unreal and mystifying expanse of cold white. The fact that no bloodshed took place here—that this gore was just an unusable leftover—is the kind of enigmatic plot twist that is characteristic of Considine's work.

The young woman depicted in the portrait *Whitney* does not meet our gaze. An ingenious combination of bright backdrop and lateral lighting produces an impression of depth that is hard to pin down. The subtle modeling of the folds in her plain black dress and the soft sheen of its fabric lend the subject, who is absorbed in her reading, an otherworldly air. *Whitney (profile)* places the same young woman in a more realistic setting, but then the elements of the background—tablecloth, chair, radiator, window, doorframe—are so tightly dovetailed that the pictorial space once again feels quite inaccessible. Considine's paintings set things and people alike at a distance. Meticulous construction yields a vision that is intriguingly sharp, but also suffuses objects and humans with an aura of inscrutable otherness.

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

Caleb Considine, *Pigs blood for a painting I didn't make*, 2017, oil on canvas, 13 × 19".