

frieze

Daniel Sinsel

Sadie Coles HQ

Daniel Sinsel once stated that he was interested in the 'latent eroticism of neoclassical painting' – though this is only half the story. What made the Munich-born, London-based artist's early, icon-like paintings dark rather than kitschy was the way in which their dormant eroticism felt so threatening. Produced around the time Sinsel graduated from London's Royal College of Art in 2004, these finely painted miniatures – in which loops of ribbon frame gay porn actors and suggestively cocked pen-knives float against depthless planes of colour – had serious things to say about the relationship between artist, sitter and viewer; a three-way freighted with an implication of violence. Sometimes, as in the case of *Untitled (man, ribbon, knives)* (2004), the male bodies have the scars to prove it; intimacy and the desiring gaze were never so far from brutality. Sometimes inlaid with precious stones or else painted on eggs suspended from small chains and panels of rare wood, these quasi-devotional works involved an element of crafted adornment. If there was a limitation to Sinsel's beguilingly personal idiom it was the potential for a kind of hermetic preciousness – art as a too literal notation of the things you love.

Though there were no male nudes in Sinsel's excellent third exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, his interest in the acute difficulties of looking and desiring was sharply developed. Of the eight works shown (all 2009, all untitled), four were paintings, though they were rather less invested in a queering of the traditions of Flemish and neoclassical painting or in the figure of the frisky young painter than before. Instead this unexpected selection of subjects suggested studies in creating space, volume and illusion. All of these object-like oils were painted on linen, though the effects were remarkably various: three yellow bamboo pipes overlap and thread through a piece of teal cloth; a wooden, beady-eyed doll's head lies face-down on a thin ledge in front of a shallow alcove, the depth of which is hard to discern; a diptych mirrors a parabola of five x-shaped insertions made through what looks like dull-finished aluminium, the surface fading from a jaundiced yellow to a queasy rose-pink; and a still life

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By Sam Thorne



OFFICE BAROQUE

of three folded and stylized leaves, each cut through with a seemingly significant number of precisely-cut holes. Aside from the latter work, the paintings are *trompe l'oeils* of sorts, an approach that conventionally aims to first deceive (when the two-dimensional is first taken for three-dimensional) then to impress, insisting on the precision of the technique required to fool the viewer. Sinsel's aim is perhaps less flashy though it places rather more demands on the viewer – his paintings are not quickly resolved conundrums. The suggestion of a precisely punctured metallic (i.e. rather than linen) support implies a very different kind of force exerted. Delivered by associative degrees, this impression of violence inflicted is more subtle than in the earlier work; paintings of knives are replaced with their apparent marks.

The other four works swapped straightforward materials for careful decoration – plaster casts, a rough sculpture in stoneware and a large linen wall-piece. Two pieces stood slightly apart, providing some attractive loose ends to an exhibition that otherwise hummed with internal references. On a plinth was a four-sided box in diagonally cross-hatched crank stoneware, jarring in its heavy roughness next to the finesse of the paintings, while, in a large linen piece (the only work in the show more than about half a metre high), the curling figures '2009' were cut into one of two layers of fabric. The flaps in the first and last number droop as the date unfurls a little – a sad, poster-like goodbye to a decade that most will be happy to see the back of.

In another work, presented in a kind of recessive hessian viewing panel, bistre ink was applied to two plaster casts of what seem to be bars of chocolate (an approach that Sinsel has used before). It should be mentioned that the artist's previous show at the gallery was titled 'Grete, erregt' ('Grete excited' or 'Grete agitated') in reference to the Grimm brothers' tale of Hansel and Gretel, a story that Sinsel has called 'erotically entertaining'. To different degrees, all of these trap-like works aim to seduce the viewer – either with chocolate or with rather harder to discern optical snares. For example, in the meticulously painted depiction of wooden pipes crisscrossing in and out of slitted marine-blue cloth, something feels amiss – while the instruments have angled mouth-pieces and ducts, there are no finger-holes and they are plainly not hollow. That is, the pipes only resemble musical instruments. Persuasive shorthand is of course the essence of figurative painting, but in Sinsel's new work this kind of insinuating similitude is persuasively equated with cutting and deceiving to figure delicate techniques in violent terms.