

KATE MACGARRY

# Aesthetica

Aesthetica engages with contemporary art, contextualising it within the larger cultural framework. The Aesthetica Blog keeps you up-to-date with reviews, previews both from the UK and abroad. For further information on Aesthetica Magazine please visit [www.aestheticamagazine.com](http://www.aestheticamagazine.com)

Wednesday, 8 June 2011

## *The Absence of External Frames: Florian Meisenberg, Kate MacGarry, London*



*Review by Mallory Nanny, a candidate for the MA in Art History at Richmond the American International University in London.*

Wednesday, 8 June 2011

Review by Mallory Nanny, a candidate for the MA in Art History at Richmond the American International University in London.

Currently on view at Kate MacGarry is an exhibition of painting and mixed media by contemporary German artist, Florian Meisenberg. Immediately upon eyeing the collection, we recognise the artist's interest in vibrant colours and free-floating forms that infiltrate the white gallery space. The absence of external frames in a number of pieces correlates to the emphasis that the artist wields toward lightness.

This air of lightness encompassing Meisenberg's work, however, finds perceptual opposition in his incorporation of text. For example, in Meisenberg's *The Vision of Tomorrow, Today* (2008), the warm multi-coloured background contrasts to the startling text that reads: "I have pain everywhere. My pure existence hurts. My eyes feel as if they would like to pop out of their orbits. My penis wants to shrink and grow inwardly." While the message expressed is rather pain-staking, the visual display of words communicates a sensation quite the opposite: cheerful fortuitousness. The letters are illustrated individually – changing in size, colour, boldness, lower and upper cases – essentially communicating a sense of child-like whimsicality when viewing the phrase collectively. Also visible is an absence of punctuation that actually benefits the animated alphabet by giving it fluidity. These aspects indicate a sign of immaturity, which, coupled with the poetic proclamation concerning bodily discomfort, offers a conflicted interpretation. What is seen and what is read are perceived as contradictory relationships, like playfulness vs. severity, ecstasy vs. suffering, and lightness vs. weight. The stark differences between the visual and the verbal may offer insight into the confusion of adolescence.

Another piece shown to the right depicts a giant nose from the profile view. Confined in the centre of a white composition, it is only accompanied by words. "Life" appears in black cursive where the slope of the

nose begins, whereas “Death” is separated into pairs of letters surrounding the tip. A dotted line descends down the right side of the painting, colliding with the tip of the nose. Again, yet through different subject matter, Meisenberg illustrates his awareness of age, using the downward slope of the nose as a metaphor for human life. Interestingly enough, the human nose never stops growing throughout one’s life. Though uncertain whether the artist is aware of this trivia or not, the nose remains a common attribute in his oeuvre, like the eye or the moustache, as it is evocative of a clown-like disguise. Similar to the previous painting, this work contains ambiguous meanings. While the nose as subject matter is perceived as playful and witty, it simultaneously functions as a memento mori.

The most interesting display of Meisenberg’s art is viewed in his series of coloured fabric paintings entitled *Some Little Artistic Attitude, Even After All*, which hang like flags in the lofty interior beneath the gallery’s skylights. The series consists of two pairs of work extending outward from parallel walls over the centre of the gallery aisle. Rather than the use of a traditional pole, each painting suspends from a broom that is attached by its head to the wall. Unlike the previously-discussed work, the opposing relationships here pertain moreover to the matters of display. The brooms appear light-hearted and comical, even harking back to the dream-like oddities of Surrealism; while, on the other hand, the height, symmetry, and innovative role of paintings as flags grant the overall installation a commanding presence. The subject matter of the paintings also differs from one another. While one piece exhibits a random pattern of rolling eyeballs, another contains facial features and material trappings in a hurried arrangement, as the positions of nose and eyeballs are reversed. The artist’s gentle portrayal of silliness and peculiarity insinuates the importance of humour in a contemporary Western culture that is so often governed by political and social issues. Whether his double-coded meanings are intended to challenge us or to demonstrate a co-existence of different expressions is uncertain. They do, however, remind us to perceive conflicting ideas equally, at face value. Those who fancy the psychological and often humorous oddities of Surrealism are likely to find Meisenberg’s art refreshing and thought-provoking.

Florian Meisenberg continues at Kate MacGarry until 9 July.

[katemacgarry.com](http://katemacgarry.com)

Image:

Courtesy the artist and Kate MacGarry, London.

Photo: Andy Stagg

Posted by Aesthetica at Wednesday, June 08, 2011