

Johannes Bendzulla
Part One: Spring 2015: En Plein Air
March 06 — April 02, 2015

“Many feel compelled to be connected around the clock because we are afraid we’ll miss something important. There is a growing movement to step out and create ‘quiet zones’ to disconnect from technology and unwind, giving ourselves time to stop and be still. Colour choices follow the same minimalistic, ‘en plein air’ theme, taking a cue from nature rather than being reinvented or mechanically manipulated. Soft, cool hues blend with subtle warm tones to create a soothing escape from the everyday hustle and bustle.”

Leatrice Eiseman, Executive Director, Pantone Color Institute®, from En Plein Air – Pantone® Fashion Color Report Spring 2015.

Twice a year, the Pantone® Fashion Color Report presents and analyses the trendiest colours of the season. The interpretation of the latest palette draws a startlingly pessimistic image of our current social situation, which, according to the text, seems to be characterised by a sense of individuals being overwhelmed and alienated by the fast pace of every day life and the omnipresence of communication technology. An escapist tone underlies the text; a longing for nature, inwardness and authenticity pervades throughout Eisemans interpretation. It’s no mistake that the report is titled En Plein Air – a reference to the Impressionist tendency of painting outdoors toward the end of the 19th Century. Modernism has influenced the impression of artists as authentic personalities and uncompromising advocates of an unalienated lifestyle like hardly any other epoch.

Bendzulla’s work can be understood as a statement against the one-sided celebration of authenticity and autonomy and, subsequently, as an attempt to question the role of the artist in contemporary society. To this end, he employs various strategies of alienation which unfold both on the levels of the works’ conception and their materials. The background colours of the exhibited images have thus been based on the trending colours of the latest season. Questions about colour composition have been outsourced so to speak. In terms of motifs, Bendzulla falls back on drawings and paintings which are mere gestures, produced entirely digitally or at least edited – a sideswipe at the aversion to technology testified to in the Color Report. Hand made paper serves as the substrate but is mounted on an aluminium construction in order to break its artistic aura. On the other hand, the classical canvas has also been deployed but in the form of printed beach chair upholstery. Printed beach chairs are usually used for outdoor advertising and it is exactly this commercial milieu that the printed motifs derive from: a stock beauty dabbles in plein-air painting, complete with pseudo-erotic posing. The almost satirical quality of the stock imagery corresponds with the wrecked digital painting applied to the three vaguely dissimilar motifs. The drawn descriptions of art related skills in some of the works on hand made paper reference the style of description common to commercial image databases and thus create a link to the motifs employed in the deck chairs.

Spring 2015: En Plein Air represents an attempt to open up a space in which promises of salvation through unabated autonomy, connectivity with nature and withdrawal into personal interiority give way to a more complex and contradictory kind of thought and action.

The next exhibition, “Arctic Winter - Versus - The Warmth Emitted By Your Computer Screen” (opening here on the 16.04.), will likewise address this group of themes, albeit under the auspices of an entirely different aesthetic. Whereas the ‘Spring’ exhibition takes its point of departure from a classically artistic aesthetic and human perspective, the ‘Winter’ exhibition will be characterised by a technological chill.

Johannes Bendzulla (b. 1984) received his MFA from Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 2012 (Master student of Christopher Williams). His work appeared in exhibition spaces and galleries including Brennan & Griffin, New York (solo, 2014), Natalia Hug, Cologne (solo, 2013), Kölnischen Kunstverein (group, 2012), Galerie BRD, Hamburg (group, 2012), Grafisches Kabinett, Dusseldorf (solo, 2012), CSA Space, Vancouver, Canada (solo, 2012) and SSZ Sued, Köln (solo, 2011). Bendzulla is completing his post-graduate studies at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne this summer. His upcoming exhibitions will take place in Parkhaus im Malkasten, and Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Dusseldorf this year. "Part One: Spring 2015 - En Plein Air" is Bendzulla's second exhibition with the gallery. He lives and works in Dusseldorf.