

Marks on the Asphalt

Paintings, Shila Khatami

Galerie Kajetan

One of the works appears to have lain down. As if it were simply too long or too heavy for the gallery wall, the perforated aluminium sheet – in this case Shila Khatami's 'canvas' – extends well into the room. It becomes both a work on the floor and a work on the wall, like a trail of shiny silver aluminium with sparsely-rollered traces in yellow and black down the middle.

The seven-meter-long work is titled "The Road," which at once resonates with innumerable associations. It conjures up a stretch of road, the lane markings of which are already quite tired and, as a result, evoke the vastness of American landscapes and, concomitantly, infinite stretches of well-worn asphalt that dissect them. Cue the next mental leap – to the precision of Minimalism born in New York at the beginning of the 1960s. This association is already a given in terms of the uniform grid of perforations in the metal sheets Khatami likes to use as a ground for her paintings, just as much as perforated hardboard. Both also correspond to the Minimalists' desire for clear, objective rules for art production devoid of gestural expression. One notices how much the artist, born in 1976, is concerned with such aspirations, which, under the aegis of Conceptual Art, shaped entire decades to follow. She herself adapts this aspiration in her paintings, such as "Damage Line," "Twins," or "Strokes," which also lends the exhibition at Galerie Kajetan its title. The claim to the absolute enshrined in this historical genre, geared toward *clean* aesthetics, vies in Khatami's works with the anarchic chaos of the everyday.

Both arcs coalesce in Shila Khatami's work, recently awarded the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. The result is a new, fascinating take on things. Deliberate reduction meets enormously broad, yet unbelievably delicate, almost transparent traces of paint that twist, turn and make sudden deviations. A portion of this results from signs that Khatami identifies in urban space: (road) markings, tags, graffiti. Others seem to be borrowed from *Informel*, a trend in painting against which the Minimalists rebelled at the time. This conflict in direction is likewise mirrored in the artist's relationship to the Minimalist iconoclasts back in the day. She masterfully combines irreconcilable elements into a conceptual position that is capable of anything and everything: she reduces her compositional palette to a few geometric flourishes and, at the same time, draws on the wealth of abstract painting (prices: € 9,300-36,000).

Christiane Meixner (translated from German by Timothy Connell, London)

— Galerie Kajetan, Grolmanstr. 58; until 25 June 2022, Tue – Fri: noon - 6 pm; Sat: 2 pm – 7 pm. Thereafter up until 13 August by appointment.