

Tomory Dodge

MONICA DE CARDENAS

The cliffs, the forests, and the few fields in the Engadin Valley were so thickly covered with snow that nearly all the contours of the landscape around Zuoz dissolved into a white monochrome. There were drifts in the village, too, where all the streets and the thickly walled houses with their little windows were snowed almost into oblivion. Then one entered through the low wooden door of one of these houses, renovated as an art gallery, to be suddenly confronted with the large, explosively colored, landscapelike paintings of Tomory Dodge. They are not suggestions of particular scenes from nature, as Dodge's earlier works were, but rather scenic constructions of moods amid a jagged terrain that might remind viewers of places they have actually experienced. The allusion to landscape develops where the density at the bottom of the painting widens into empty space above, where one feels caught between micro- and macroworlds, where the interplay of intensely bright and deeply dark elements becomes reminiscent of natural light.

Yet the paintings remain abstract, and one expects abstraction to continually seek new analytical and gestural methods of achieving its goals. Dodge refers to *pentimento*—the unintentional traces of earlier states that are often seen in the paintings of the old masters. In Dodge's work, various phases of a painting's development emerge onto the stage at the same time in a fierce display. They are by turns finely nuanced, intricately interlaced, or violently opposed to each other. Eventually it is barely possible to distinguish the layers in the painting; one sees only the overall effect of the colors. This is *pentimento* for the present. Just as the sources of data today tend to become lost in the Internet's tissue of hyperlinks, the abstract textures formed from many transpositions, divisions, and partial effacements construct spaces and surfaces that vibrate vitally, even while they are constantly vulnerable. In this way, all the paintings are like still images of painting's unresolvable confrontation with itself.

This was Dodge's first solo show in Switzerland, and he exhibited exclusively new work. The variation of large and small formats, painting and collage, suited the labyrinthine plan of the old house. The technique of collage, understood here as the permanent confrontation of independent parts, became a principle of the exhibition as a whole as well as of specific works. In this context, each painting felt like a world unto itself in terms of color, in the style of its execution, and the connection of disparate visual elements. Key to an understanding of the exhibition was the diptych *Sleepless* (all works 2011), whose apparent symmetry reflects a freehand copying of each constitutive gesture: Against an evenly striped background, each brushstroke or smudge appears twice, as if everything had been first sketched out *alla prima* and then reexamined in a mirror on the opposite side of the painting. Here painting sounds itself out in its own echo chamber, while the viewer's gaze remains constantly in transit between the two halves of the picture, seeking differences and correspondences, experiencing the painting as a deviation from itself. *Sleepless* bears witness to the brilliant state of alertness that Dodge uses in all of his works as he navigates between analysis and release, construction and manifold intersection. In each painting, Dodge is on a different journey, always steering the self-referentiality of abstraction, turning it so far that it becomes an existential experience that goes beyond painting.

—Hans Rudolf Reust

Translated from German by Anne Posten.

