



Sean Scherer and Urs Albrecht, 1991, Installation view.

HELSINKI

SEAN SCHERER

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Time, the avant-garde, and Europe can be problematic concepts for American artists, but Sean Scherer's paintings grow out of these concepts. His work seems to echo the dilemma that has faced the American esthetic in recent years: do we see more than what we see? In other words, does art also have a spiritual dimension? Scherer's paintings take their point of departure from the Russian avant-garde of the beginning of the century, especially Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism. Many "neo-geo" artists have drawn from the same well, but Scherer takes his historical journey on his own terms. Not only is he interested in the visual rhetoric of the Russian avant-garde, he also investigates the paintings as historical objects. Everyone who has seen Malevich's *Black Square*, 1915, in its present condition, knows that it is not black, that it has been oxidized to blue-gray, and that it is badly cracked. The process of aging—perhaps even becoming senile—of the avant-garde interests Scherer. It generates an organic component within the geometric vocabulary of his art; in several of his paintings the circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles also contain fine cracks, and the contrasts between the black, white, and primary colors have been muted with a mistlike patina.

Although Scherer simulates avant-garde rhetoric and imitates the patina of old paintings, he is not simply a retro painter. The anachronistic game is interrupted here and there by borrowings from the vocabulary of Pop art or of cartoon strips: the red star of the avant-garde becomes a contemporary pop-culture symbol. Thus, his paintings also problematize time. Whether this is a question of the death of history, of the random juxtaposition of the esthetics of different ages in the present, or of perceptive art-historical commentary is very much open to interpretation. To my mind, Scherer presents us with nostalgia, albeit with a sense of humor; his art tells us at least part of the truth about our relationship to the early-20th-century avant-garde.

Seen together, Scherer's paintings add up to more than the sum of their parts. A single, isolated painting blurs the context of his work, since the rules of his game are not necessarily evident in each individual work: the commentary and irony fade into pure nostalgia. In addition to Scherer's work, the Swiss architect Urs Albrecht renovated and redesigned the entire gallery: the walls and architectural details were painted in bright reds, yellows, greens, and blacks, specifically for this exhibition. The two artists arranged the installation together. Albrecht's approach is more obviously structural, and Scherer's perhaps more metaphysical; this ideological tension extends the scope of the exhibition.

—Kimmo Sarje

Translated from the Finnish by Michael Garner.