

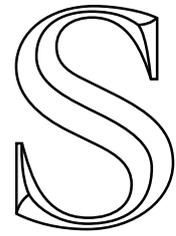
Armen Eloyan

A solo show by Armen Eloyan

Curated by Samuel Leuenberger

19 October 2019–24 January 2020

Opening Reception: Friday 18 October 2019, 6–9pm



SALTS

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Depending on how you look at contemporary painting, the genre swings from abstraction to figuration and back again, which makes it a question of endorsement. These waves of appreciation for one style or another are based on how timely the subjects are, flourishing cultural trends or what sensory stimuli we have urges for. There comes a time, however, when a tipping point is reached, urges are fulfilled and former interests devolve into platitudes. But the cycle usually reboots itself so we oscillate between changing loves for styles, moving with a rhythm that is closely associated with our moods, the marketplace and prevailing culture.

It is a weird thing, since for painters today, oil and acrylic still offer new freedoms, new paths to tessellate installations into complex, collage-like propositions. How we read canvases as pictorial, conceptual or emotional carriers directly informs our experience of the photographic. Today, the reproduced image is much less about the physical encounter, as it is about forensic recognition. Our relationship to popular culture is reflected in a vast amount of contemporary painting; the more we ease into it, the more we find chains of association and the more pleasurable we find the task of dissecting the familiar. Vice versa, one could argue, the more abstract the brushstrokes, the more uncritical we seem to be when it comes to discerning value.

Armen Eloyan has produced a new installation for SALTS that consists of two distinct rooms. The garage walls are covered with drawings, and like ascetic scribbles these drawings fill the entire lower half of the garage. Like the preacher's infectious message, the repetitive swirls of the drawing spread through the space and gather in intensity as you enter the second room. Moving through, we are greeted by a 80cm-tall pencil sculpture. With its cartoon-like facial features, big eyes and impish smile, the pencil is certainly guilty of something.

Indeed, the lead tip of the humanoid pencil touches the wall, as if poised to continue rendering the endless circles that layer the walls in sfumato effect. The pencil and its charcoal trace are one: a gesture that merges sculptural, drawing, filmic and performative elements by the artist into a Gesamtkunstwerk. In many ways it is also a portrait, not of Eloyan, but of the relentless mind-to-hand-to-surface gestures that many artists feel compelled to produce. The urge to create and to 'put out' new work, the fear of not doing enough or simply the enjoyment of mark-making, quite literally becomes an act of artistic survival, of being seen.



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In the second room, Eloyan presents a series of wet paintings from his 'Pets' series. The fresh odour of drying oils will continue to spread through the room for the length of the exhibition. The paintings differ in size: a group of small paintings are accompanied by three large portraits of googly-eyed, hairy bodies straight out of Sesame Street. Though the brushstrokes have been executed quickly and have the same swirling quality of the wall drawings, the surface texture goes well beyond a singular gesture, here, the works encompass a universe that dictates Eloyan's painting style. To his mind, the surface of each subject informs style. And this is exactly what makes Eloyan's painting so relevant to our contemporary moment: a genre that adapts, camouflages but never purports to be anything other than itself. A kind of painting that emotes, that mirrors our presence and informs subsequent action.

Armen Eloyan lives and works in Zurich. Before coming to Switzerland he lived in Amsterdam for almost 20 years, graduating from the Rijksakademie in 2005. He emigrated to Europe from Armenia at the age of 20. His work is informed by a range of humorous and dark themes that relate to cognitive processes and prompt physical responses. What one sees on the surface of Eloyan's work is usually hard-wired to our own feelings of joy, fear and angst.

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