

ARTFORUM

Reto Pulfer

ISTITUTO SVIZZERO DI ROMA

Via Vecchio Politecnico 3

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Reto Pulfer's work is best defined as painting, though it isn't painting exactly. The thirty-year-old Swiss artist's arrangements of dyed fabrics are not quite installations, either; they are more like paintings that extend in three dimensions, intolerant of the closed form of the conventional canvas but tied to the compositional principles of the medium. Indeed, Pulfer often thinks about his works in terms of figure and ground, and even its canonical materials (painted and drawn canvas) are borrowed from painting. His work is a form of abstraction with a subtly imaginative disposition, quiet yet rich in the latent energy that is also present in the artist's brief, tumultuous musical performances. The work's generative principle resides in a series of synesthetic associations, which he calls "mnemonics."

In his current exhibition at the Swiss Institute—an indoor and completely reworked version of an outdoor installation shown at the Institute's Roman branch last summer—these associations revolve around the idea of exhaustion, as evoked in the title of the work, *Die Vertretung des Erschöpften* (Depicting Exhaustion), 2011. At the center of the room, which is bedecked in turquoise fabrics and pieces of sewn-together leather, sits a small tent made of white veils. If one stands inside it and looks out, everything takes on a cloudy appearance, as if the beholder's glance had been misted; on the floor are tools and small items made of hide, traces of a project apparently left unfinished. The performance during the show's opening—a series of wild cries of jubilation—left the artist breathless. It is impossible, and also futile, to try to explain it all. Pulfer's associations aspire not to coherence but to a different, more ambitious goal: poetry.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.



View of "*Die Vertretung des Erschöpften*" (Depicting Exhaustion), 2011.

— Simone Menegoi

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