

Chris Succo

Shadows Are Phantoms

Nov 17, 2024 — Mar 2, 2025 | Galerie Stadt Sindelfingen, Germany

The Galerie Stadt Sindelfingen is showing *Shadows Are Phantoms*, Chris Succo's first institutional solo exhibition, from 17 November 2024 to 2 March 2025. The exhibition provides insights into the painter's oeuvre based on newly created paintings.

Shadows Are Phantoms is the title of Chris Succo's exhibition. Fitting for an oeuvre that unites both the shadows of the past and those cast by the glaring light of the present. For as fresh and contemporary as the large-format, powerful paintings may be, they are deeply rooted in the postmodern tradition of abstract painting. Their seriality makes them look like experimental arrangements that gradually excavate the past in order to question the possibilities of painting in the face of an overstimulated present. Accordingly, the influence of the Abstract Expressionists appears to be very present when one encounters a work on paper entitled *De Kooooning* (2024) or is confronted with a series of large-format paintings with black and silver colour spaces (2024) reminiscent of those by Mark Rothko or Clifford Still. The clear tendency towards large formats as well as the formal character of the paintings confirm this suspicion. But then one comes across canvases onto which photos have been collaged as well as a series of black paintings (2024) on which 'PAINTER' is written in large green letters. In view of this, it becomes clear that the matter with Chris Succo's works is not that simple.

The lettering comes from the title card of a video work of the same name by Paul McCarthy, which, from an artist's point of view, tragically, from that of an outsider yet comically summarises a painter's tale of woe between the creative process in the studio and the harsh reality of the art market. This reality also seems to be decisive for *Shadows Are Phantoms*. For the studio is central to many of the works in the exhibition, as the place where the search for one's own artistic expression begins and art is not a means but an end in itself, before commercial interests blur its meaning. That in mind, the serial hanging and the fourfold repetition of the word 'Painter' in inverted commas as well as the fact that the lettering was printed and then collaged onto the canvas, seem like a vehement self-assurance.

It is important to know that Chris Succo studied at the Dusseldorf Art Academy in the 2000s, at a time when the 1980s generation, such as his professor Georg Herold or Albert Oehlen, provided the teaching staff. To put it mildly, the punks of German art history and probably the last ones to embody the image of the artist who, driven by a creative urge, tears down conventions. They were also the generation that brought painting back into focus in the 1980s after Fluxus, Conceptual Art and Joseph Beuys. This is the environment in which Succo was 'socialised', in the firm assumption that he was pursuing his vocation and not a profession. He would only later learn what it means to be an artist integrated into a fast-moving consumer society.

The entire staging of *Shadows Are Phantoms* also resembles a kind of anti-attitude towards conforming to the given museum framework. The largest exhibition space appears strangely empty, while the smaller rooms hold large-scale series. *Untitled* (2024) shows the artist's studio and is leaned against the wall in a rotunda on two concrete bricks, while *The Unknown Known* (2024) and *Shadows Are Phantoms* (2024) are installed on autopoles in the room, creating a backdrop-like setting. Anything but what you would expect from a classical painting exhibition. Although the artist's own personality is inscribed in all the works in one way or another, it only becomes accessible through the immediacy of the painterly gesture in works such as *The Unknown Known* and *Shadows Are Phantoms*, or the silver-black paintings mentioned at the beginning. Looking at these works, one inevitably realises that it is painting with all its power that the artist is actually concerned with.

The delicate, light floating colour spaces of the silver-black paintings cast a spell over the viewer, almost sucking them into their own dimensions. Their different proportions influence the sense of space in relation to one's own physicality. Although the painter's style is much more restrained in these paintings than in such as *Bone Sculpture America* (2024), it is still present.

Meanwhile, the initial motif of the Van Dyck brown work *Painter* (2024), is abstracted to the extreme in a powerfully energetic network of lines, leaving only a shadowy figure recognisable in the right-hand half of the painting. Every brushstroke is clearly defined. In some places, the lines are condensed into areas of colour and implied forms in which the style still remains present. Nothing stands between the painter, his canvas and the colour; the creative process is revealed.

Chris Succo filters, fragments and dissects the past as well as the present, weighing up their significance for his own practice. De Kooning, Still and McCarthy become just as much material in this process as the collaged photos from the artist's studio. Succo's works thus are personal filtrations of his own reality. The lived, the perceived, the good or bad. The reality that crushes you and the one that allows you to carry on. In *Shadows Are Phantoms*, he opens up his universe to us and lets us participate in his restless search for meaning in painting.