

ARTFORUM

Silvia Bächli

By Jens Asthoff

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Though Swiss artist Silvia Bächli uses a broad range of motifs and moves constantly between abstraction and representation, there is something constant in the appearance of all her works. Is this similarity the main characteristic of her oeuvre? At times, the extreme reduction, the brevity, of her glazed gray-black gouache drawings is reminiscent of Asian calligraphy. In this exhibition, the reduction has been intensified; Munro describes these works as offering “magical simplicity.” Bächli’s pictures should not be interpreted only formally; they are précis of the living. The contraction is characteristic of both the subject portrayed and the artist’s process (blending the two has always been one of Bächli’s strengths). She typically works on paper, and the resultant works usually contain natural, organic shapes. The lightness of these images, as if seized whole, is the product of her concentrated and lighthearted approach: Delicate flower motifs complement abstract, more eccentric pictures, including light, floating grids; swaths of color that sweep across the paper; and layered planes in tones of deep, saturated gray. The brushstroke is everywhere visible; ultimately, there is no doubt that the artist’s hand has orchestrated these subtle, diluted applications of paint. Despite Bächli’s light touch, these are not sketches, but rather the singular, recognizable signature of a practice developed over decades. Also included here are small-format landscape photographs, quiet views of wooden houses covered in snow and lit by the midday sun. Certain surfaces are untouched by this layer of white, emphasizing and outlining the strong colors of what is depicted. These sharp photographs seem to be the real “paintings” in this exhibition, while the pale gray paintings gently investigate the limits of drawing.

Translated from German by Jane Brodie.