



Peter Dreher, *Tag um Tag Guter Tag Nr. 0 (Day) (Day by Day, Good Day Nr. 0 [Day])*, 1972, oil on linen, 10 1/2 × 8 3/8".

Peter Dreher

KOENIG & CLINTON

In her recent collection of essays and interviews, Lynne Tillman filed her interview with German artist Peter Dreher in a chapter titled “U for Unheimlich.” This categorization rather marvelously signals the artist’s main achievement: his transformation of a perfectly ordinary object into something eerie. Dreher has painted the same glass on the same table in his studio every day since 1974, and in so doing, he has made this simple thing deeply unsimple; the recent installation of 134 of these paintings at Koenig & Clinton was nearly vertiginous in its suggestiveness.

The premise of “*Tag um Tag Guter Tag*” (Day by Day, Good Day), 1974–, can be digested in an instant, but comprehending the series scope requires more than a glance. Each painting is small, nearly square, and executed on burlap, board, or aluminum. At Koenig & Clinton, the

selection of works was installed in an eye-level row on three walls and on a fourth wall in a grid. The works on the first three walls were arranged chronologically, starting with a painting from 1972 in the very middle labeled NR. 0 in faint pencil scratched on the wall; this work was, in fact, Dreher's very first glass painting, his square one. To the right, in chronological order from 1974 to 2013, were paintings of the glass made at night; to the left was a selection of paintings made during the day, similarly arranged. To walk along these rows of works was to see difference in smaller and smaller increments, even as you leapfrogged from year to year: the appearance and development of a spot of light on the rim of the glass and its subsequent disappearance; the horizon of the table refracted through the glass into a parabola of varying depth; the appearance and refinement of the distorted reflection of a window or a flare of light; a shape that might or might not be the artist himself. The basic thing becomes a vehicle for a kind of abstraction—for the play of shape and tone—but remains (stubbornly, amazingly) concrete.

Dreher is a contemporary of Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter, and for him, as for them, the appearance of Pop alongside the influx of consumer goods into West Germany after World War II was explosive. But whereas the Düsseldorf artists turned American Pop into sardonic Capitalist Realism, Dreher went in a different direction, embarking on a more single-minded quest of repeatedly seeing and re-seeing individual objects.

The idea for the project, Dreher told Tillman, came to him while he was sitting in the bathtub. He decided that he wanted to “paint the most simple thing I could imagine,” and that the work, at its crux, would be nothing more than an expression of his own desire to paint. And yet from such a plain premise, contradictory riches have come pouring out. They begin with the choice of the glass—a vessel, an empty one at that, whose transparency seems to dare the viewer to think it is offering up everything it has. The project is both the same and different every day, an aggregate of still paintings and temporal movement, like a decades-long filmstrip—as with Agnes Martin's lines or On Kawara's dates, the work becomes a way of marking time—that follows no logic and evinces no progression. The project can be viewed as a rote gesture elevated to a spiritual exercise, to a way of seeing the world anew every day, to finding the mystical in the banal (if one happens to be inclined in that direction).

When we look at the glass, we look through it—or do we look at the surface of the canvas?

One of Dreher's greatest achievements is the way in which he so completely sunders seeing and perceiving and at the same time so firmly insists on their relationship to each other—the simple thing, so uncomfortable.

—Emily Hall