Untitled, 2020, oil on molino, 100 x 70 cm

Courtesy: the artist and FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna. Photos: kunst-dokumentation.com

Portrait LUKAS POSCH

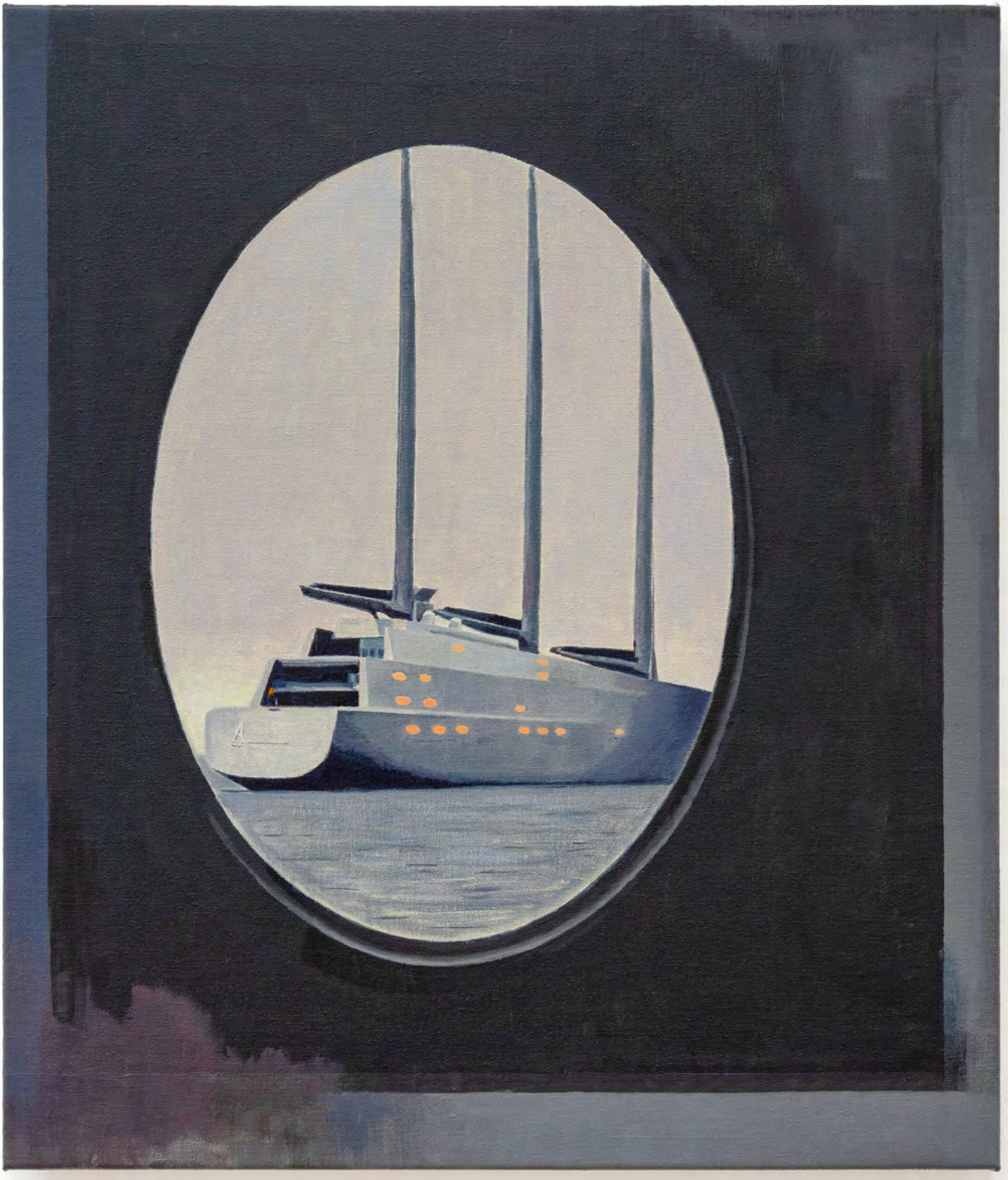
True, AI could be prompted for something like a Lukas Posch painting; but good luck reproducing his wider system of images. Amid the latest tech-driven crisis in the notion of authorship, the Austrian artist's figurative works, at once real-seeming and estranged, attest that the medium has never amounted to meaning, just its unstable visual clues.

By Kari Rittenbach

Untitled, 2024, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm

VISION QUEST

Photo: Júlia Standovár



Untitled, 2025, oil on canvas, 70 x 60 cm

Courtesy: the artist, FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna, and Greene Naftali, New York

Untitled, 2025, oil on canvas, 80 x 65 cm

Untitled, 2025, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm

Photo: Studio Posch

To what do we owe the current cultural fetish for readymade cleverness? People want answers.

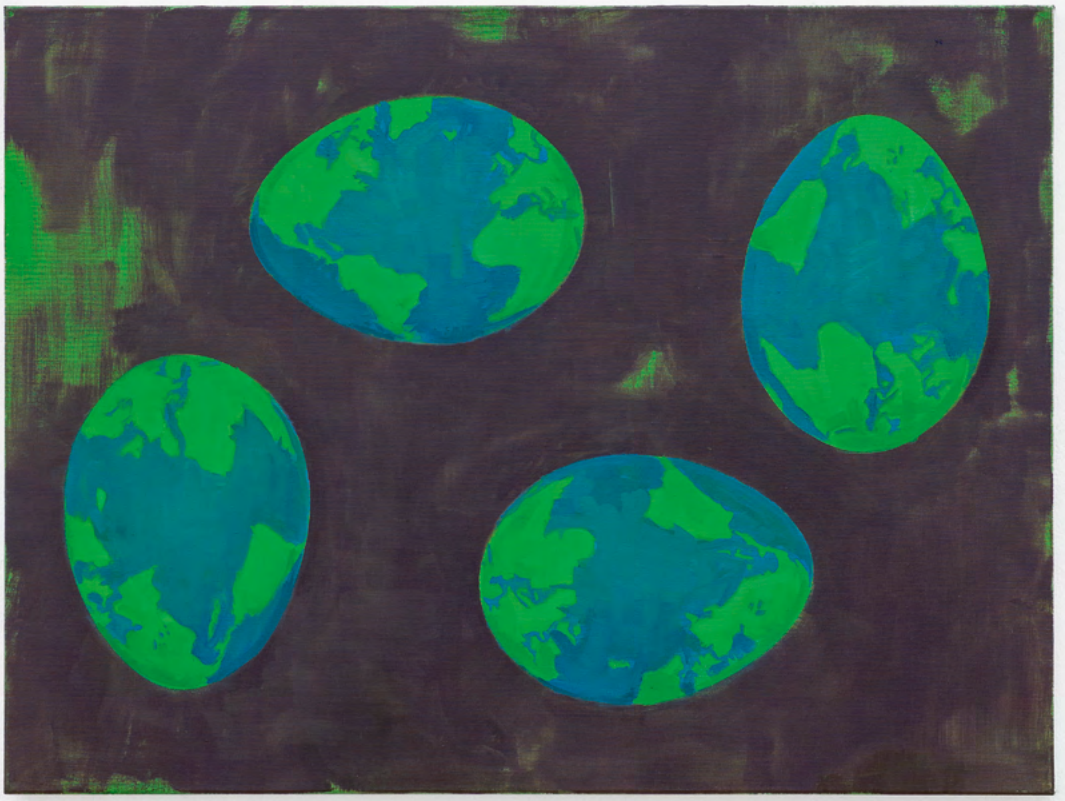
The title of Lukas Posch's 2024 solo show at Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna, invoked the latest term circulating ominously as a cipher of generalized optimization, capital speculation, and, simultaneously, broad economic decline: "Artificial Intelligence." Long trending in news media, wielded as a cudgel against entry-level job-seekers, and often misattributed to the generative, pre-trained transformer (GPT) that strips all work-related email correspondence of passion, emotion, enthusiasm, and any *Weltanschauung* (world view), conventional AI was displaced here by ten untitled canvases. Their enigmatic, fragmentary "images" and loose organization return us to the very stakes of representation within the visual arts, namely, realism and its discontents. Because painting is always already artificial, the claim for its lingering (or long ago) intelligence remains open to debate. Certain 20th-century German figures – Sigmar Polke, Martin Kippenberger, Michaela Eichwald – would perhaps hazard an *artificial stupidity*, or at least absurdity in lieu of presumed knowledge or terrible skill. To what do we owe the current cultural fetish for readymade cleverness? People want answers.

Untitled, 2025, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm

Photo: Studio Posch

Last year, in his essay "The Future of Search" for the *London Review of Books*, sociologist Donald MacKenzie quoted from the most famous critique of the large language model (LLM), the 2021 paper "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots." Co-authored by computer scientist Timnit Gebru, computational linguist Emily Bender, and five anonymous contributors, it characterizes the LLM as "haphazardly stitching together sequences of linguistic forms [from] its vast training data, according to probabilistic information about how they combine, but without any reference to meaning;" ie., at scale, its unpredictable, not-exactly-sensical formal repetitions do not really do the work of analytic deduction – or generate information. MacKenzie, writing on the vast neural-network architecture undergirding ChatGPT and the service's extremely rapid uptake by users, also speculated on the potential abandonment of the open web, much like Web 2.0 supplanted the wilder cyber world of electronic bulletin boards, anarchic self-publishing, and special-interest forums. Were that to happen, it would rhyme with the ongoing breakdown of public institutions and knowledge systems, beset by austerity politics and delusional egoism. What then, in the near term, is the future of search (to crib MacKenzie's title), if we don't know what is missing – nor how to look for it?

This crisis of perception – meaning and/or its mimicry – necessarily bears on contemporary painting, which



Untitled, 2024, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm

Courtesy: the artist and FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna. Photos: kunst-dokumentation.com

retreats into its received archaism by materially modeling form. For Posch, the question of intelligence arises from a total system of images, which, in the singular, might be invented and certainly only partial, but otherwise appear naturalistic and even familiar. His painterly application of color – its blending or lack thereof, and the transparency with which it is laid down, studiously brushed, or scrubbed away – is calculated to reveal the artist's hand, or, rather, the point at which the picture's graphic information dissolves into its very matter. From the group exhibition "Scenes of Disclosure" at Greene Naftali, New York, last summer: two birds in elliptical flight, eclipsed by an offstage sun, are set against a glowing sky, each silhouette feathered at its edges with shady pixilation. Swatches of umber, rose, terracotta, and a smear of pumpkin dapple the street-facing façade of an abandoned pharmacy, its grid of windows framing the letterforms of KOSMETIK (COSMETICS), as if calling beauty to order from mild disarray. Wide, inviting, and dark underfoot, a winding staircase invites the way up, while a slender wooden banister, snaking along both walls, beckons the hand from the lower corner. Against a rectilinear ground of patchy forest-green and deep midnight-blue, the dull yellow outline of the Palme d'Or, logo of the legendary top prize at Cannes Film Festival, floats to the surface. Awkwardly cropped along the left-hand edge, the asymmetry is counterbalanced by a small white orb in

Posch's approach to subject matter is mostly arbitrary, and may rely on verisimilitude, utter estrangement, or both at once.

Both works: *Untitled*, 2024, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm

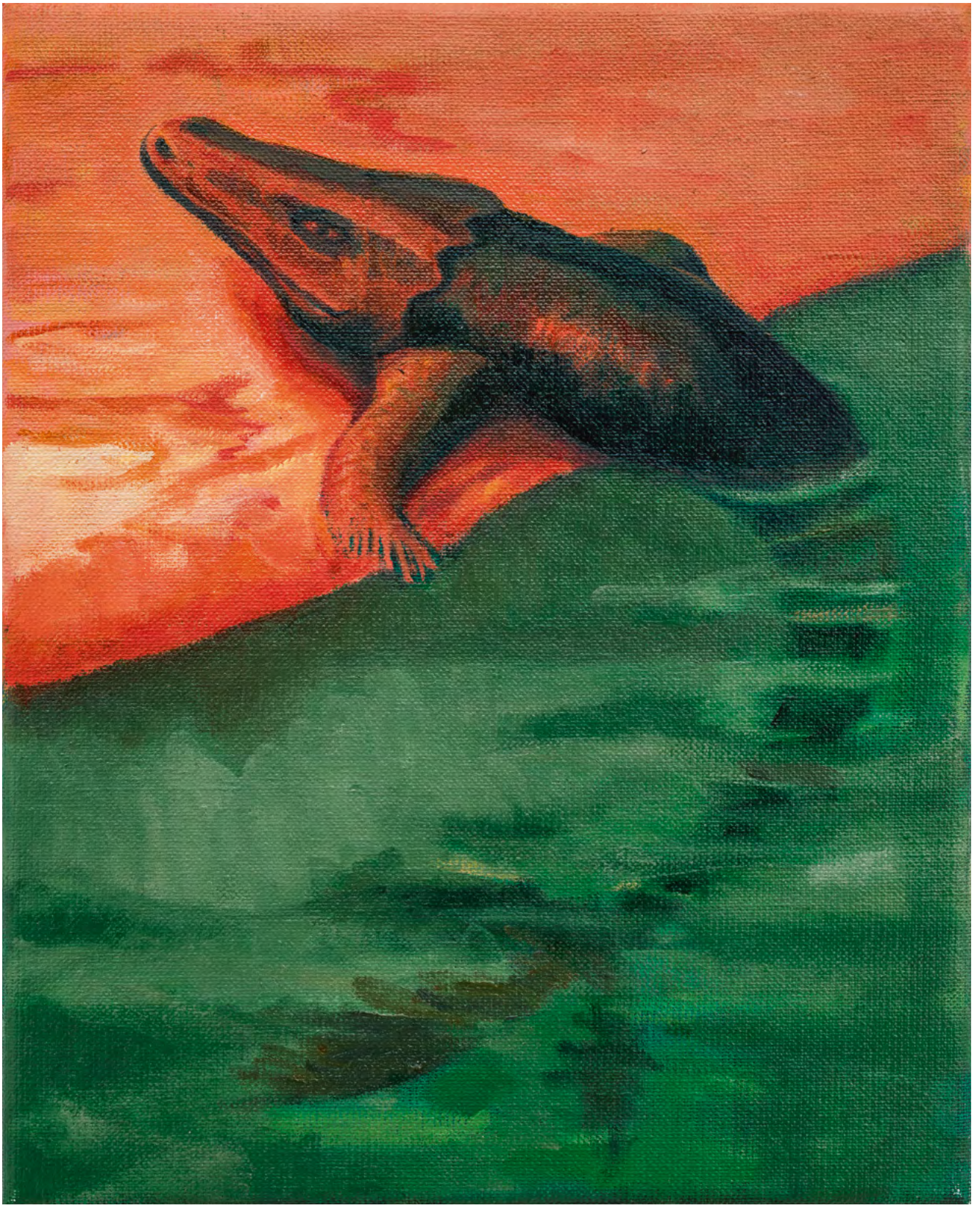


Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com

New Media, 2024, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm

the upper corner, like the residue of a water droplet dried on the camera lens (all works *Untitled*, 2025).

Posch's approach to subject matter is mostly arbitrary, and may rely on verisimilitude, utter estrangement, or both at once. Take the thick, strangely upright Snickers bar projected from the lower right quadrant of a canvas and shyly extruded from its thin plastic wrapper (*Untitled*, 2024): here, the prismatic crust of once-liquefied milk chocolate, thicker on one side, frames an aquamarine monochrome that visually collapses into the painting's deep, minty background. For Posch, the composition of each canvas, much like the sequencing of several works in groups or pairs for display, is determined – as if linked computational subtasks – by a kind of modulation, twisting or attunement toward (or away from) a particular key or harmony. And yet, this organizational logic is external and ambiguous, for his pictures are neither misapprehended elements of code nor scrambled narrative devices, but unstable visual clues. At times, real-world references are left legible, such as the cement-block motif from Frank Lloyd Wright's Mayan Revival residence in Los Angeles, the *Ennis House* (1924), densely rendered in recursive folds to structure the eye's movement, in what the artist describes as an "improvisation of the right angle" (*Untitled*, 2024). Similarly, the view through an imagined porthole in Trieste onto a super yacht, designed by Philippe Starck for the Russian billionaire Andrey Melnichenko (*Untitled*, 2025), or the sagging slashes of a Lucio Fontana canvas from the 1960s, pinned above the blank and soulless hearth of Kim Kardashian and Kanye West's former Bel-Air mansion (*Untitled*, 2024), shamelessly excavate content with precise plays on form. Flat yet plastic, the repetition of these apriori images ultimately unravels anything that might resemble meaning.

The only titled painting from "Artificial Intelligence" adapts an illustration from a biology textbook, showing the basic evolution of an amphibian in the Devonian period, over 350 million years ago: *New Media*, 2024. Starting from the premise of human observation of pre-history as already preposterous, and at very best only approximate, the work depicts a delicate reptilian hatchling seeming to pull itself onto dry land from brackish green waters. A dubious, richly saturated source image ripe for reproduction and indeed misconception, for Posch, new media is a sinister and slippery creature. —

Untitled, 2025, oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm

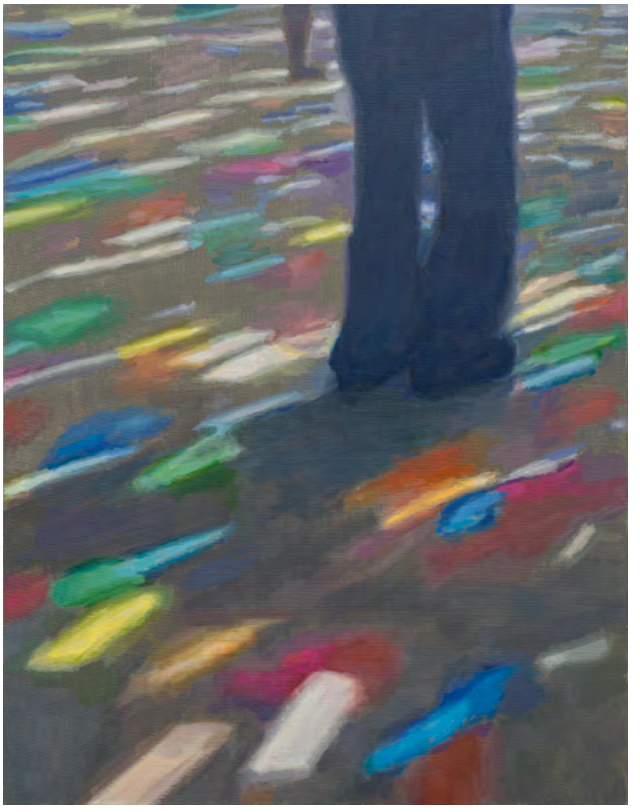


Photo: Studio Posch

The composition of each canvas is determined by a kind of twisting toward (or away from) a particular key or harmony.

LUKAS POSCH (1988, Hall in Tirol, Austria) is an artist living in Vienna. Recent shows include "Scenes of Disclosure," Greene Naftali, New York (2025); "Artificial Intelligence," FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna (2024) (solo); Alienze, Vienna (2022), "Der Radwechsel," University Gallery of the Angewandte Heililgenkreuzerhof, Vienna (2022); "ZUGZWANG," MQ Art Box at Museumsquartier, Vienna (2021) (solo); "Spooky Butt," Centre for Experimental Theatre, Brno (2021).

KARI RITTENBACH is a critic and curator based in New York.

Courtesy: the artist and FELIX GAUDLITZ, Vienna