

## DANIEL KARRER

Inbescreen: painting in the time of the Cloud  
by Rebecca Geldard

*We live in an age of miracles so commonplace that it can be difficult to see them as anything other than part of the daily texture of living.*

Tom Chatfield, 'How to Thrive in the Digital Age'

There can be no linear working-through of the surfaces, motifs, colourways and textures of Daniel Karrer's paintings. In each frame, varying perspectives on a given situation seem to co-exist, like slides from the autopsy of an event, lovingly and meticulously layered in an attempt to recreate it. The tree-ring sense of chronology implicit in the depictions of woodwork and greenery here, appears metaphorically obscured in a wave of developing emulsion, by the light-pollution from electronic devices or through digital manipulation. Lines, when they appear, tend to alter rather than lead the eye towards the view. These folds and fissures serve to break up the picture plane, facilitating the possible existence of some other origami dimension just out of physical reach.

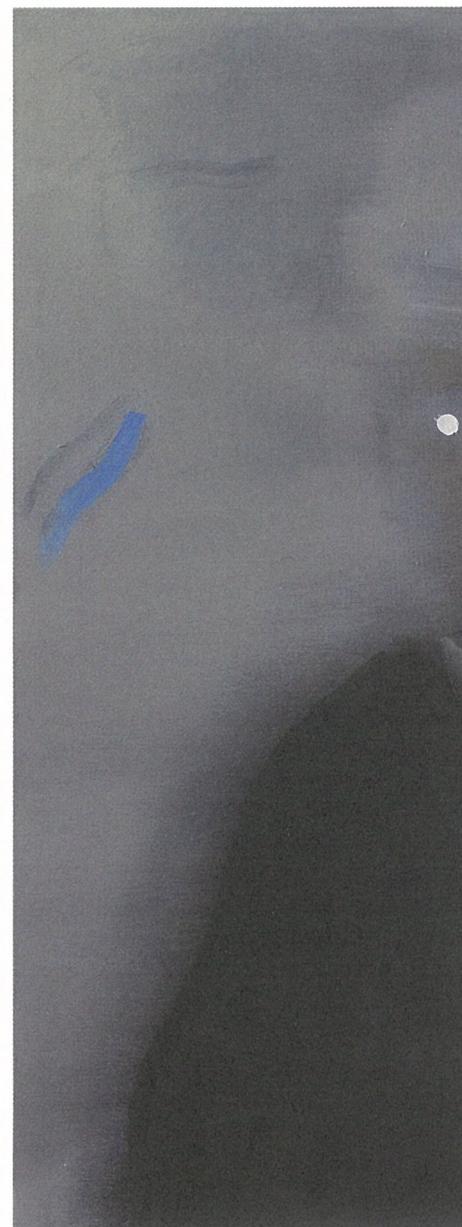
The fabric of Karrer's magic realism appears to have been cut and sutured from a variety of sources: whether disquieting avatar habitats, benign desktop wallpaper swatches, or the papery layers of personal albums. For these works are quite literally built from images that bring one back to recognisable things and places, albeit sandwiched and interspersed in ways that defy everyday logic. Magic, in this case, veers more in terms of meaning towards the knowing, illusory kind than that of folk tales and the uncanny. The smoke-infused or vaporous theatrical sensibility of Karrer's styling is perhaps there to remind us of the constructed and highly interpretive nature of reality, even before it is 'captured' by technology. His palette is loaded with the colours of tech innovation: of Gif animations and Photoshop fades, or even the latitudinal lines of saturated ink printed onto paper, which forever alter its materiality. Over and over again, however, one is reminded of light emitted from screens and the alien glow it bathes users in.

It makes sense, therefore, to learn that each painting is composed of parts that may have previously existed in one or more material states and contextual guises. Internet imagery, found images and Karrer's own photographs form the mainstay of his personal archive. Once copied from source and saved, or (re)scanned back into the pixelated realm, the artist arranges the elements to create digital collages, which he then translates into paintings. Rules, though, seem to have limited influence over the process, as the content in any given case might just as likely have emerged from the artist's imagination. Certainly, multiple depths of field are implied within the dimensions of a single image, into which viewers might project their own imaginings. One can envision walking into particular interior spaces and physically handling the sculptural objects on display, as well as encountering evidence of them in reproduction, or the combined experience of both.

Composition, in every sense – from the possible properties of the places and matter depicted to the formal nature of their arrangement – is open to question. Painting-

to-painting, one is taken from the high-colour, glossy surface of the magazine page or artist's book to the fluid or possibly gel-like state of an aquarium, via the less tangible physicality of projected light and how it alters the appearance of the things it illuminates. Through the use of visually gaseous or seemingly liquid layers of paint, Karrer articulates the hermetic sense of being physically confined, whether trapped in actual space or virtually accessing information through devices – sealed within LCD interfaces and miniaturised among the data. Alternatively, the obfuscating effect his techniques induce also bring to mind smears on smart-tech surfaces, such as the greasy residue of finger-print trails, which can make abstract poetry of a screen's surface, distracting the eye and the mind from the data it contains. However spartan a scenario might appear, the complex messiness of human interaction and perception is always present in the details.

Karrer has created a painterly shorthand for a range of visual effects. The stippling of foliage here simultaneously recalls other historical depictions of the bucolic in paint, as well as the fact of them having been subsequently recorded: from the postcard-flattening of real-time data into paint or print to its dimensional resurrection into pixels. Referencing both the real and its many modes and means of reproduction, Karrer aptly conveys the concertina effect of particular sensory triggers. Elsewhere, brown longitudinal stripes of woodwork and elegant tessellations of parquet flooring are synonymous, not only with the history of art, but also upmarket gallery and



museum interiors. Rocks, meanwhile, whether iconic mountain ranges or non-specific lumps of ancient matter, become equally recognisable in these works by the depressions they create under fabric and the subsequent warping effects on its patterns, as by a pictorial sense of dimensional compression. Karrer's material handling of stuff can elicit positively synaesthetic responses. A fat brushwork swipe used to describe a solid block of wood, for example, appears almost edible in its apparent state of changing from one form to another, like an iced-cake version of the object.

The artist's allusion to the ephemeral shadow-play of the screen, meanwhile, is more Xbox than cinema, more true to the idea of rebuildable content contained within its dimensions, than projected fully formed onto a blank surface. There is a surreality to the situations described that while offering a nod to the origins of such in painting, also gives rise to the idea of remote interactivity – virtual worlds in the process of being created and navigated by the pushing of buttons. Yet these works, inextricably linked like memories, are not hastily recalled visions from the mind of an over-stimulated gamer. There is a stillness and specificity of purpose to Karrer's compositions more indebted to Morandi than Minecraft. Aspects of the cult-platform's boxy construction do appear to be in evidence, though. The artist's amorphous suite of angular art objects and model-like props might have been dragged and dropped around a gaming or software-canvas cut-and-paste zone, first, as if in attempt to work out the dimensions each will occupy as representations on canvas and paper.



Like Richter, Tuymans, Sasnal and other painters before him, Karrer makes one aware of the technological processes and contextual factors that influence how everyday images are read. There is little doubt that in the time-span from one end of this artist list to the other – the evolutionary distance, say, between the snapshot and the selfie – the politics of engagement have become increasingly complicated. The world view is changing and so are the languages used to describe it, which is reflected in Karrer's approach. For while he may be equally interested, as Richter et al continue to be, in how the materiality of paint and its application might articulate the contemporary image-viewing experience, the artist appears focused on current notions of 'display'. In today's parlance this could concern the particular register of the screen as a shiny membrane through which we negotiate digital information. It is also a word frequently used when describing the formal placement of artworks in exhibition spaces.

Witnessed within a gallery setting, the paintings appear to offer alternative views of possibly connected sites. One is reminded of theatre sets designed so that different realities and physical spaces might seem to exist on a single stage. While Karrer does not require the viewer to suspend disbelief in quite the same way, there is something equally spectacle-savvy about the cracked-mirror potential of his arrangements; images of objects in space then becoming new objects in similar spaces. The artist is likely also aware of the fact that his works are increasingly being experienced as virtual entities – uploaded data – at different resolutions and scales. Evocations of windows and other portals in these works facilitate wormhole moments that connect the past with the present, and a long history of painterly motifs with ubiquitous everyday activity on-screen.

With every lingering mark, Karrer appears to acknowledge his and our own susceptibility to the seductive power of images and the technicalities of their making. His hybrid constructions, in two and three dimensions, speak of an innate human desire for the pure thingliness of things, as well as a need to make sense of and impact the design of our surroundings. There is a sense of perfect implausibility to the many beautiful facets one encounters. For such painterly exquisiteness, even when stripped back to the barest of visual details, is contingent on the basis of the imagery belonging to multiple sources and modes of interpretation. We are still in freefall when it comes to processing and finding words for the composite nature of reality in the digital age; of being both user and inhabitant of a variety of codified realms at any given time. Karrer's works may collectively communicate this sense of floundering in time without clear co-ordinates, but individually they offer many resonant footholds: sensory markers in a moment likely to reward those willing to reach for them with a meaningful negotiation of what it means to be in flux. ●