

18/04/2026

Gent

Dearest Hadrien,

Upon seeing your latest work, I realized that it has been a very long time since I saw *energy* channeled into a painting expressively. I have encountered many powerful works, many expressive works, many explosive works even, but they all had in common a certain form of restraint. It seems as if there is a code of conduct in the art world, a form of etiquette, if you will, that imposes how artworks should behave. They should be pristine, not messy, and delicately presented. They should be removed as far as possible from the cluttered studio situation.

A number of your works can be placed in this contemporary display of restraint. One of your most recent works, by contrast, does not hold back. You installed a canvas wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling in the residency space of Fondation CAB. The canvas is left untreated, with large smears of blue paint all over. The smears or strokes mostly follow a diagonal direction from the top left corner to the bottom middle. They have a swiftness and impatience over them. I can distinguish the bodily movements that these paint smears required. I can follow your arm moving over the canvas. Moreover, it seems as if the location of the brush strokes is not really tied to the canvas as a whole. As if this was a pure act of painting, without detour to composition.

And yet I don't read it as an expression of your individual energy, or as an expression of your mood or character. There is something more universal happening on the canvas.

The longer I think about it, the more I realize that the whole tradition of Western art, or at least painting, is based on such restraint. With some exceptions in the lyrical baroque tradition, there are only few instances of truly expressive, energetic paintings that come to mind. Even in the abstract tradition, the formula and materiality of the canvas seem to guide a very controlled engagement with the work. I am thinking of the homogeneous splash coverings of Pollock, or the meticulous compositions of Clyfford Still. The composition of the whole takes precedent over the energy of the painting almost every time.

Contrary to all this polite painting, there is an undercurrent throughout history that unleashes something different onto the canvas. I am, of course, thinking of the barely distinguishable seascapes of the inimitable Joseph Mallord William Turner. Or some exceptional pieces by John Constable that we discussed, such as his astonishing *Rainstorm over the sea* (ca. 1824-1828). The guttural smudges of Francis Bacon are certainly noteworthy in this respect. Some early David Hockney paintings come to mind as well, where figures seem to disintegrate by a gust of brush strokes. Finally, the work *Tisch* (1962) by Gerhard Richter has recently tickled my senses. Here, Richter has blotted out the center of a fairly simple painting of a table. The smear is so large and so guttural that it seems to swallow the painting whole. (There is a striking resemblance to the effect of Constable's *Rainstorm*, I think.) Each of these figures seems to stand outside of traditions and styles, breaking loose from figurative traditions and compositional rules. Not only the materiality of the paint breaks loose from its confined, restrained and polite position in all these instances. All of these paintings—that occupy rather singular positions in their respective oeuvres—appear as expressions of pure energy where motion takes precedent over feelings.

The large canvas you developed during your residency at Fondation CAB stands outside of abstract painting traditions for me, and enters into a dialogue with these works that are, somehow, much more figurative; there are storms and gestures of dissatisfaction. Likewise, your canvas seems to disintegrate; there is an unclear relation between paint and canvas. Furthermore, the canvas takes on an uncomfortable relationship to the space: it awkwardly turns a corner, is composed of multiple parts, and, most importantly, is conveniently cut to create a slit in a doorframe and, later, actual door openings.

All this glorious directness and frankness relate the canvas to your earlier work at La Cambre (2022), Art au Centre Liege (2023), Krupa Gallery (2023), and the Green Corridor (2023). In each of these occasions, you interacted with a similar uninhibitedness directly with the walls of the space. Now, at Fondation CAB, the raw, untreated canvas mediates a more nomadic and fluctuating attitude. It makes the work oscillate between the extremely specific (the doorframes match the residency space) and the flexibility of a canvas that can be rolled up and transported anywhere.

Where will you take it—or where will it take you?

Fascinated as ever,

Louis De Mey