

photograph

STEFAN HEYNE: SUPER VISION: THE NEW GERMAN ABSTRACTION AT DIANE ROSENSTEIN

By Catherine Wagley

March 24, 2017



Stefan Heyne, *SEAT 19F*, 2016. Courtesy Diane Rosenstein Gallery

The photographs in Stefan Heyne's first solo exhibition in the U.S., *SUPER VISION*, on view at [Diane Rosenstein](#) through April 15, are like a cross between flattened, smoothed-out Rothko paintings and Ed Ruscha's iconic, acrylic *Hollywood* (1968), with everything but the sky removed. In other words, Heyne's color gradations are at once ascetic and ever so slightly Pop. They are also actually photographs of cloudless skies, though they seem more sunset-like than actual sunsets, the color too

depthless and seamless to appear representational.

A Berlin-based artist who worked as a stage designer throughout the 1990s, Heyne began working as a fine art photographer in the early 2000s. Since then, he has often been contrasted with the New Objectivity of the Bechers, Thomas Struth, and Andreas Gursky. While they embraced the documentary, Heyne abandons it entirely, though he retains their obsession with smart composition and surface quality.

His triptych *Who is Afraid of Photography* (2014) consists of one blue, one yellow, and one red Lambda print mounted on aluminum. The prints, most vibrant on the bottom, fade to gray and then to black near the top, as if a shadow has been cast over an otherwise flawless expanse of color. The title brings to mind Heyne's own theoretical explorations into the nature and relevance of photography, which include the *Manifesto of Tabularism*, which he co-wrote with German art critic Ralf Hanselle in 2014. Like so many manifestos (the Futurists come to mind), theirs starts out by declaring a death: "From today photography is dead." It goes on to describe how "[l]ight and darkness are [Tabularism's] true motives," implying that the fundamental elements of the photographic medium should trump representational impulses. Photography must "break out of the camera box" in order to achieve freedom.

Given that Heyne's show opened soon after, and in such close proximity to, the Los Angeles County Museum's tribute to Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, king of the cameraless experiment, talk of breaking out of camera boxes seems quaint. But Heyne's approach to light resonates in Los Angeles, where light and space and sunset obsessions have been central to artists' explorations since the 1950s. Here, in the city where James Turrell, Fred Eversley and Ruscha got their start, and where Alex Israel hired a Hollywood scenic painter to get his skies just right, Heyne's project seems endearing. He's just one more artist trying to get closer to the elusive properties of light, paying homage to sunsets in the process.