

PEARL LINES

KÖLNISCHER KUNSTVEREIN, 2019.

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By Moritz Wesseler

Born in Macon, Georgia, USA, in 1989, Walter Price creates paintings and drawings that deal with personal emotions and experiences, social conventions, and historical developments. His predominately small-format works usually depict interior or exterior spaces occupied by living beings, objects, signs, symbols, and forms that hint at limbs, figures, palm trees, hats, sofas, urinals, and cars, as well as the outlines of architecture or vegetation. These visual elements—some more easily deciphered and others referring to the artist's African American heritage—are not always brought into a clear relationship with each other, making a form of narration palpable, yet intangible. This is supported not least by the fact that Price forgoes traditional patterns of order in his compositions, subverts hierarchies, and does away with perspective, all of which lends his paintings and drawings an unusual appearance that occasionally exudes the beautiful simplicity and purism of drawings by children.

Occasionally, letters and writing can be made out in Price's works, although they are mostly only visible when truncated and partially concealed and therefore seem to be more like the echo of a verbalized thought rather than designed for instant readability. Another characteristic feature of many of Price's works is an intense, vivid use of color that can be ascribed to a superb handling of the palette. In addition, a large number of his works are characterized by a heightened interest in the materiality of the raw materials he uses, something that can be understood both through his highly gestural and tactile application of paint as well as through exposed paper and canvas supports. In this way, a conscious confrontation with representatives of classical modernism in Europe and the last outliers of American postwar art can be seen in the strong and expressive use of color as well as the specific handling of materials, one in which the artist authoritatively formulates his own language, despite any references.

The exhibition *Pearl Lines*, which was conceived especially for the Kölnischer Kunstverein, is the first comprehensive presentation of Price's still-young practice in an institutional context. Breaking with the characteristics of his previous paintings, the works presented are relatively large—a uniform 30 × 40 inches in size. Each is painted on brown particle board, bears the same title, *Felt soot*, and oscillates much more strongly between narration and abstraction. In this respect, Price seems to be striving to continually develop his practice rather than adhere to a defined aesthetic.

The presentation in Cologne would not have been possible without the support of a multitude of friends, colleagues, and partners. In this context I would first like to thank the artist himself, who brought great passion to the project. I would also

like to take this opportunity to thank Brendan Dugan, Siniša Mackovic, Dan Nadel, Conor Backman, Emma Hazen, David Schoerner, and Karma New York for the many ways in which they enthusiastically supported the show during its realization process. Also, I am indebted to UNIQA Kunstversicherung and in particular to Ursula Cornely and Christina Meyer, who played a considerable part in making this publication possible. The same applies to Andrianna Campbell, whose essay written especially for this catalogue describes Price's new group of works with sensitivity and in detail.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my colleagues at the Kölnischer Kunstverein. The commitment of Marianne Walter to the administrative process in her role as managing director, supported by her assistant, Sofia Beletskaya, was an important factor in the realization of the exhibition—equally so the dedication of Juliane Duft and Uwe Becker, who were directly entrusted with its curatorial and technical realization.

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