

Helene Appel "On the Cutting Board" at P420, Bologna

04.04.2023

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The works in the exhibition feature seemingly simple objects/subjects that are so commonplace by virtue of their individual qualities and formal characteristics that they merge into the background of our everyday experience: an envelope, a vegetable, a piece of cloth, a towel, a pile of rubbish, a mound of earth, the pavement we walk on, the light of a parked car. These objects, which may appear trivial to us, taken for granted in our everyday life, with their real shapes and sizes, are imposed on our vision and thus regain a value we had not previously considered.

The title "On the Cutting Board" makes direct reference to a specific painting exhibited here that depicts a chopped fennel bulb on a rough canvas. In this case, the full-scale representation of the chopped fennel determines the size of the painting, which in turn becomes the size of the cutting board. A section of pavement spans almost the entire height of the gallery space, a painting of an envelope, by contrast small and pale, comes across as unusual in its lightness and intimacy. The smallest object depicted in the exhibition is a grain of sand, shown in countless multitudes: tiny dots and details fill a large canvas.

“Helene Appel looks at things and paints them, as faithfully as possible, with consummate skill,” writes Gabrielle Schwarz in the text accompanying the show, “She has been doing this since the mid-2000s, training her attention on all manner of subjects—big and small, beautiful and ugly, organic and inorganic. [. . .] For Appel, painting is about entering a relationship with the things she depicts, in which both parties are transformed by their encounter with the other. The artist is led by her subject, altering her canvas size and technique according to its scale and form and texture, but the subject also depends on the artist and her choices to become something entirely new: a painting. The surfaces of her canvases are records of this generative dynamic. With their subtle enchantments, they demonstrate an obvious but rarely acknowledged truth: that painting does not simply present but rather produces reality.”

at P420, Bologna
until April 29, 2023