

Fernando Mesquita
escuro

03.05. – 17.05.2019
new jörg wien

It is inaccurate to describe Fernando Mesquita as a "painter". Ever active in performative and curatorial projects (the distinction of these two are often blurred in his works), painting does not even constitute the majority of his output. Yet, I'd like to insist on the centrality of painting in his practice. As numerous events, exhibitions, performances, and social gatherings testify, Mesquita has boundless interest in the dynamic of temporal actions and their resonances, both artistic and human. His paintings give tangible form to this interest. In other words, painting is the focal point of his diverse artistic engagements. It is the illuminated spot in a large tableau that keeps the clamouring elements together.

What is crucial to all of his paintings is the fact of them being worked on. These pictures ostensibly testify to the worked-on-ness of their surfaces, though they also possess considerable pictorial qualities. The gestures that brought these worked-on surfaces into existence have nothing to do with the heroic gestures and brushstrokes of Abstract Expressionism or Neo-Expressionism that celebrate the artist's inflated sense of individuality. In contrast, Mesquita's gestures strike one as acknowledgements of the extreme briefness of the actions that begot his pictures, and fragile attempts to capture these moments. In this regard, his paintings have something in common with "Last Date" by Eric Dolphy, a live recording by Dolphy shortly before his untimely death at the age of 36 in 1964, where he famously said: "When you hear music, after it's over, it's gone in the air. You can never capture it again." It is this delicate immediacy and its extreme elusiveness that Mesquita strives for.

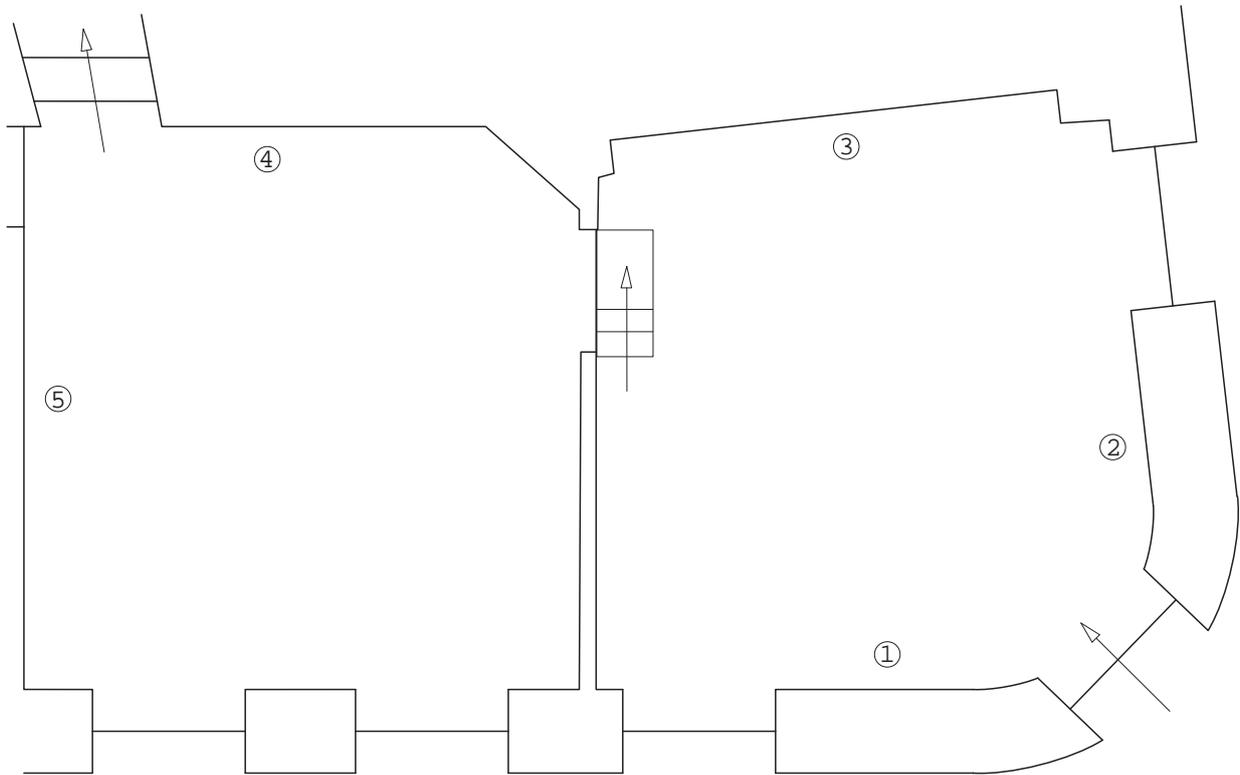
This evanescent nature of mark making is eloquently demonstrated in the two works from the "Composition" series included in this exhibition. In this ongoing series, Mesquita puts a piece of synthetic fabric with a napped, velvet-like texture on a stretcher and gently rubs the fabric's surface against its hairs to leave a trace of his hand movement. These traces can easily be erased by rubbing the fabric in the opposite direction, creating works of exquisite subtlety and fragility. The marks are temporal in their essence, hairs on a piece of textile standing toward a wrong direction, and can be made to disappear without any effort. Mesquita suspends their temporal state and turn them into a painting, permanently on the cusp of erasure.

Other works in the show also rejoice in the pleasure of mark making, in the act of capturing the moment when an artistic intention came into contact with the surface. The title of this exhibition offers a key to understanding how Mesquita works. Escuro means "dark" in Portuguese, and in darkness, touch replaces vision. To move in darkness, we fumble. We carefully stretch our hands forward to figure out what's ahead of us, the world is suddenly dominated by the nowness of contact that offers neither future nor the past. It is a state dominated by tactility and the present. This is an apt metaphor for Mesquita's practice. His paintings and drawings demonstrate what pictures could emerge from a commitment to the momentary contact with pictorial planes. Neither consumed by the zeal for progress nor haunted by the art history, his is radical abstraction not overburdened by vision.

Yuki Higashino

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1
Circulars, 2019
Charcoal on paper
26 x 17,5 cm

2
Horizontals, 2019
Charcoal on paper
27,6 x 25 cm

3
Composition on velvet (brown), 2019
Velvet on board
260 x 180 cm

4
Still unnamed #3, 2019
Chinese ink and oil on paper
118 x 102 cm

5
Composition on Alcantara (blue), 2017
Alcantara on board
180 x 130 cm