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Philipp Kremer: With Lovers

DECEMBER 27, 2019 BY EVE WOOD — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

at Nicodem Gallery, Los Angeles (through February 1)

Reviewed by Eve Wood

Imagine a faceless orgy, a concupiscence of bodies – colliding, embracing, penetrating, wherein the entirety of the surrounding picture plane is reduced to a senseless expanse of writhing and roiling flesh. In Philipp Kremer's work, the notion of desire is determined by an exploration into genderless ideation. Sex is not strictly sex, nor is this beautiful lovemaking, but an electrified and energized landscape of human intersections – hand in hand, arm over arm, face into face, thigh across thigh, torsos twisting and contorting in a vaguely nihilistic expanse where no two people ever seem to truly connect.

These are not so much paintings that explore the exuberance and passion of being alive as they are works that privilege anonymity. These paintings are sensationally modern and reflect the ennui of a dying race where our base instincts override our need to be seen and understood. Kremer's lovers derive from their surroundings as there is no clear delineation between their corporeal selves and the brightly colored rooms they occupy. As viewers we long for familiarity, for a point of entry, a trace of human kindness, but the fact Kremer's figures have no discernible features forces us as viewers to focus entirely on their actions, while also frustrating our desire to sympathize or identify with them.



Philipp Kremer, *Couple (II-II)*, 2019. All images courtesy of Nicodem Gallery, Los Angeles.

His paintings are visceral and lush, yet controlled and vaguely ominous. Imagine Gauguin as a Futurist, and these paintings begin to make sense. As with Gauguin, the figures represented here are deeply rooted in their surroundings. In fact, their bodies mirror the shapes and colors around them. But where Gauguin used the landscape as a persuasive and seductive element, Kremer appears more cynical and distant from his subjects. Kremer's is a world where action and reaction are the determining elements of a largely predetermined universe. The lushness he achieves is not of the spirit, the richness of color suggesting a more profound connection to nature and the world, but are born of necessity, i.e. desire is an undeniable marker of human existence, and we, rapacious and lustful, are controlled by it.

The artist appears to privilege the human body as a vehicle for change, cruel and faceless as it sometimes is. Kremer also flattens both the foreground and the background simultaneously which further gives these paintings a sense of emptiness; also, no one object, including the human bodies present here, takes precedence over another. Thus, a chair or a couch is infused with the same emotional weight as a penis or a breast. Kremer utilizes bright colors throughout to achieve this sense of uniformity and the effect is to flatten and compress the totality of the image.



Couple (II-IV), 2019

In *Couple (II-IV)*, 2019 for example, two people are seen engaged in fellatio, while on the chair beside them a porn movie is playing on a laptop. The sex act appears as stilted and oddly disassociated as the brightly colored furniture.

In other images, Kremer's figures appear to be socializing, yet stand oddly isolated from each other. In *Kiss (II)* two featureless people stand kissing in the foreground while behind them other bodies lean into each other, whispering sweet nothings. What is most compelling is the fact these faces are comprised entirely of brushstrokes, the animated and energized lines that result from the movement of paint across the canvas. Their faces are pure energy, which is ironic given the fact their bodies appear static and unmoving. Perhaps Kremer is suggesting that the physical form is ultimately unreliable in that it ages and eventually dies, and that we must seize life while we have it and live it to the fullest. His intentions are inscrutable just like the faces he paints. In many of the paintings we see familiar physical gestures.



Kiss (II), 2019

In *Kiss (III)* for example, a woman and man are foregrounded on what appears to be a dance floor. The man holds the woman's face in his hands as she grabs his ass from behind, but these particular figures are less engaging when compared to the small green face of a young man gazing up. What he's looking at exactly is unclear and really it doesn't matter. What is significant is the placement of his face in the lower corner of the painting. It is a strangely poetic gesture as the all too predictable mechanism of human desire plays out around him and he alone is compelled to seek an alternate reality. Whether this reality is God or just a jet flying overhead is also unclear. These small and seemingly insignificant moments, often buried within the larger scope of these paintings, are like small precious jewels that long to be discovered. Within the banality and tediousness of our human toils, as we ransom ourselves to each other, there is still the possibility of beauty and salvation.



Couple (II-V), 2019

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Eve Wood is Los Angeles Art Critic for Riot Material Magazine. Ms. Wood's poetry and art criticism have appeared in many magazines and journals including Artillery, Whitehot, Art & Cake, The New Republic, The Denver Quarterly, Triquarterly, Flash Art, Angelino Magazine, New York Arts, The Atlantic Monthly, Artnet.com, Artillery, Tema Celeste, Art Papers, ArtUS, Art Review, and LatinArt.com. She is the author of five books of poetry. Also an artist, her work has been exhibited at Susanne Vielmetter and Western Project and Tiger Strikes Asteroid in New York.