

# Elizabeth Dee

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## Pieter Schoolwerth

Elizabeth Dee is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings by Pieter Schoolwerth in the gallery at 545 West 20th Street. A reception for the artist will be held on Saturday, October 8, from six to eight pm.

"While the visual dimension in art, considered as an epistemological category of the pursuit of truth, continues its slow retreat, Pieter Schoolwerth advances his full-blown, *maximalist* attempt at figuring and representing contemporary life and the forces of abstraction that shape it one step at a time. While many artists, confronted with the confusion of an over-saturated image culture, might choose to operate from the perspective of the private sphere, Schoolwerth keeps engaging the complexities and perplexities of what he sees out there through the vital energy of what he has in him; and painting as such is coming more and more to the rescue.

Part of the excitement provoked by such an all-out endeavor, and, perhaps, a good measure of its ambition, is that it initially grounds the viewer into familiar territory: a couple in a therapy session, a family scene at the dinner table, a juicy hamburger here, an oversized mobile telephone there. Anchored in these basic settings and situations, the paintings unfold their wide array of erotic sense effects, ranging from the painterly to the semiotic, from the beautiful to the literally monstrous.

In distinction to his earlier work, which exclusively submitted paint to its pre-modern function as the medium of rendering, Schoolwerth now inscribes some of the medium's inherent attributes directly into the scenes themselves. In *Couple*, for instance, the woman's right arm turns into an armature of thick paint in sharp contrast to her emerging hand and the detailed features of her face. In *Family*, the father's white shirt does nothing but trace the sinuous paths of a wide brush. And the contours of the child's body in the foreground disappear into a swirl of brown. None of these effects, however, can be strictly described as *abstract* or *expressionistic* inasmuch as they contribute to perform the layers of narrative in the picture. Paint disfigures and redoubles the husband's face in *Couple* and allows him to look back at himself simply because having to confront the horror of oneself, so they say, is a crucial aspect of therapy. Such motivated readings of the action are possible, but they are surrounded by areas of far less obvious meaning, where the stuff of paint, in tune with its modernist potential, loses its narrative purpose and takes on a life of its own. The play of give and take between these two modes of appearance make up the pulse of the image as it reveals itself.

Forceful as it remains, the wild and often hilarious dance of signs in these new compositions has become less overheated and more assured as it encounters the gravitational pull of paint's material qualities. The dynamic structure of the image benefits from this added dose of realism as it assimilates often close to unimaginable distortions of time, space, and form.

If for Schoolwerth painting has to do first and foremost with observing the world, seeing is the result of liberating and enhancing specific forces in the image in order to find ways to actually depict the invisible in action. And the work of the invisible takes place in the world as much as it looms in the artist's mind. In *Session*, the father figure who appears in all the paintings in the exhibition tightens his necktie as his body merges into a fan. In turn, the fan projects a diagonal shaft of air and light through the orgiastic event and spills the contents of male fantasies onto a round mirror above the bed.

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In more general terms, the artist does not shy away from the task of depicting the tasteless things of our consumer society. He even deems it both an uneasy duty and a reality test. The effort consists of an oblique celebration in which every element in the painting is presented in its separated, quasi-generic state before entering into a precarious and experimental relation with the other elements around it. As a consequence, the picture is always in the process of battling to produce itself before our eyes. Things can go right and things do go wrong indeed, depending on what you see and for what harmonies you might be looking. Therein lies the unsettling life-force of Schoolwerth's work."

--Miguel Abreu

This is Pieter Schoolwerth's second solo show at Elizabeth Dee, and his sixth in New York. His work has been included in exhibitions at the Centre national d'art Georges Pompidou in Paris, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut, and the ICA in Boston, and written about in *The New York Times*, *Flash Art*, *Time Out New York*, and *V Magazine*. The artist lives and works in Brooklyn.