

Reviews

Martin Eder

★★★★★

Hauser & Wirth

Mayfair to Sloane Square

It's very easy to be relaxed about bad taste now that we've all got the hang of the 'it's-so-bad-it's-good' line of argument. The odd irony, however, is that we're happier to pretend that everything is indifferently crap in order not to have to assert that the stuff we like is somehow better than what everybody else likes. So what would the genuinely bad look like today? Probably something like German painter Martin Eder's horrendous paintings of pug-faced fluffy cats, showdogs, dead fish and pasty-fleshed naked girls with chunky tits and arses: paintings which grind away at our recently cultivated culture of indifference, fusing so many layers of calculated dreadfulness that we finally choke and give up trying to swallow so much dross. It's an exhausting experience, and very funny into the bargain.

So Eder's naked women combine the dodgy, male-orientated erotics of soft porn with the painterly ambition of the old masters, fed through the cranky amateurish competence of a misogynist provincial painter. But when they're posed next to an outsized show cat, or a huge, glassy-eyed trophy fish – those asinine markers of middle-class suburban culture – it becomes clear that we're being provoked into taking sides: are you into cute girls or cute kittens? Eder tests the space between private predilection and public consensus by which painting derives its cultural authority, to make paintings which nobody (except perhaps the uber-sophisticated collector perverse enough to have one of these above their sofa) would ever want. You have to be really good to alienate your viewer to this extent – and Eder is a master.

JJ Charlesworth



'Schweigen/Silence', oil on canvas, 2009