



PSM

Schöneberger Ufer 61
10785 Berlin

PHONE +49 30 246 492 00

EMAIL office@psm-gallery.com

OPEN Tue – Sat, 12 – 6 pm & by appointment

WEB www.psm-gallery.com
[instagram.com/psmgallery](https://www.instagram.com/psmgallery)
[facebook.com/psmgallery](https://www.facebook.com/psmgallery)

Nathan Peter

Surface Memory

09.09. – 27.10.2023

What is the 'material'? Is it the ensemble of physical objects around us, the 'things' we can touch, smell, feel? Is it a memory, the consequence of a spark of electricity between two neurons? We try to anchor our experience in tangible things around us, yet they inadvertently disintegrate into their component parts, with only an intangible shadow remaining. Dense foliage will grow and then decompose; a piece of linen will become a painting, to be unravelled and then recomposed, revealing its material reality. In 'Surface Memory', Nathan Peter encourages us to be aware of this reductive cycle, the physical constantly in flux, decomposing and regenerating, at once rooted in the tangible world, but also resurfacing as an immaterial memory.

In *The Sense of Order*, the art historian Ernst Gombrich argues that a frame is suitable when it fades away and we do not see it. The same can be said for the materials used by artists, in this case linen. Usually an absent presence, Peter recentres the fabric from our peripheral vision, as unravelled strings of linen weave between each other to interlink canvases. These fragile tendrils making their way from one painting to another are a physical depiction of the intangible memories that link two points of reference. Instead of signifying distance and separation, it is a fulfilment of connection.

The distillation of the composing elements of the painting reveals the importance of memory. The golden stretcher reminds the viewer of gilded frames predominant in the Baroque era, but upon closer inspection they are one step removed from this tradition. Instead of the delicate gold leaf, they are a distressed industrial gold foil. The viewer is faced with these temporal shifts that hang on a memorial hinge: being pulled towards the past as the present remains unflinching, with the potential of the unravelling of our own understanding.

And, as nature abhors vacuum, Peter helps us reconstruct these intangible memories, as we are urged to observe the reality of the physical material behind the process of painting. Light is brought into the foreground through a process of reduction, the decay left to sink into the darkest parts of the canvas, re-emerging as a lush green composition of dense foliage.

Similar to the decomposition and renewal of intangible memories, nature follows the same schematic structure. The subject itself becomes an exploration of the resurgence of life, while the unravelling of the canvas introduces a new layer of physical decomposition. Like the removal of painted layers revealing the ground canvas, so the deterioration of the canvas unveils the brightness of the wall behind the frame, exposing a constant cycle of regeneration, which escapes human touch and is structured only by time.

As technology advances and time is artificially accelerated by machines, we become more acutely aware of the obsolescence of our own bodies. To escape this alarming tempo, refuge is found in what has traditionally been static: nature. The botanically trained eye will realize that all the works in the exhibition feature monstera plants, a symbol of lush unadulterated greenery, coming from areas of the world that have been nicknamed the 'Lungs of the Earth'. But as these regions suffer from massive deforestation and commercialisation, leaving many of us breathless, both literally but also as a physical reaction to its shocking reality, much of contemporary culture has become structured by a latent eco-anxiety. This fear of destruction finds its parallels in Peter's work, as at a first glance the lush greenery seems to disintegrate into the brown threads.

However, the artist encourages us to think in terms of regeneration, as once we have anxiously stretched our imagination over the void and recomposed these tenuous threads of linen with the memories of the foliage once thought lost, we are rewarded with the reappearance of the unscathed nature. Thus, like the green scenery appearing from the 'lifeless' linen, so does the possibility of re-emergence and healing of nature surge from our fears surrounding its destruction.

Reuben Micu

Nathan Peter (b. in 1978 in Minneapolis, USA) lives and works in Berlin. He studied painting at the Rhode Island School of Design, during which he engaged in a year-long Honors Program in Rome, Italy. Examining pictorial aspects between various stylistic ages and the intersections that have remained active over the centuries, Peter's fascination has guided his practice towards an environmental analysis of painting. He focuses on the spatial, physical, and luminous aspects of the medium, as well as the intricate cascade of folds, both pictorially and tangibly. His works translate themes of ephemerality through a reductive way of painting by erasing, dissecting, unravelling, or grinding away instead of adding to create something new. Peter's works have been exhibited internationally at PSM in Berlin, DE (2020); The Boros Foundation in Berlin, DE (2020); Travesia Quatro in Madrid, ES and Guadalajara, MX; and the Denver Art Museum, USA (2013).