

For a Respite from Work: On Painting, the Object, and the Emptiness

Mateo Sito presents himself at the exhibition *For a Respite from Works* (Karas Gallery, 2025) with two carefully articulated units. The first, bearing the exhibition's eponymous title, *For a Respite from Works*, consists of several objects created in 2024: the artist's easel, modified with woodcutting chisels, three chairs, and five painting-objects created through the transformation of wooden artefacts. The second unit, *Who's Bothered by the Forest of an Old Oak* (2024), includes three oil paintings on wooden panels of varying sizes and a documentary photograph. In his self-ironic *biography*, which serves as a reference point for the first exhibition unit, Sito introduces himself by his first and last name and indicates that his easel is placed next to us. He then proclaims, in a manifesto-like tone: "In my works, I explore the segments of easel and wall painting (easel and wall)." The artist, through deliberate repetition or sardonic paraphrase of a parroted statement, which is often heard among adherents of the anachronistic concept of painting as an identification with what they are engaged in, confronts us with the fundamental postulates of the space of the painterly space. These include the imagined wall of the studio, which in this case is transformed into the wall of Karas Gallery, the easel, three chairs, and the remnants of chairs transformed into painting-objects. Sito transforms objects and wall into a work of art, rethinking the ideas of ready-made, appropriation and anti-museum practices. Much like Vladimir Dodig Trokut, Sito transmutes and alchemises everyday, discarded objects. Interventions with paint or engraving do not aestheticize the object but rather integrate it into Sito's ascetic/reduced visual language. The work displayed in the second unit (oil paintings on wooden panels, *Field One*, *Field Two*, and *Field Three*) was created based on a photograph taken in Slavonia, in November 2023, in a location where, according to Sito, "a forest once stood not so long ago, now replaced by freshly ploughed fields". With this work, Sito refers to the use of organic materials but also materiality in Anselm Kiefer's experiments with media,

GALERIJA KARAS

employing transparent layers to incorporate the wood's texture into the composition. The grain and knots of the wood represent the field itself, while the distant landscape and a narrow strip of sky are painted (*Field One* and *Field Two*). In *Field Three*, however, the horizon is absent; Sito engraves scorched wood, alluding only to the ploughed land and the vanished forest. These three paintings are accompanied by a printed documentary photograph of the actual field. Factual, just like a hunting photograph devoid of interpretation.

In his statement accompanying the first unit of the exhibition (applicable to the entire project at Gallery Karas), Sito notes that by abandoning painting, he frees up “space on the white wall for the rest of the visual senses and on the restored black chairs for physical rest.” Not only do walls, but spaces themselves, occasionally need respite from artistic interventions. Similarly, the artist himself rests from his work, from what he leaves behind or creates in the medium of painting on the wall and what previously stood on the easel. Only by opening up a space of emptiness can the question emerge: what constitutes work, and what constitutes rest? As Bob Black, in his essay *The Abolition of Work* (1985), concludes: “Free time is mostly devoted to getting ready for work, going to work, returning from work, and recovering from work. Free time is a euphemism for the peculiar way of labor ...” For Black, abolishing the rigid concept of work would transform life into play, or rather a world of games, and he partially refers to artistic creation with the term 'play.' In 1985, when this text was first published, artistic creation could still be romanticized and seen as existing outside dominant economic hegemonies. That is no longer the case. What Sito does is transform his work/free time and free time of the wall and easel into a game again. He removes them from the frameworks of conventional worldviews, the educational system in which he is still learning and the art scene he is entering. In this way, he also expands our horizons. Where the forest has not been cut down, the gaze always reaches towards the sky.

Josip Zanki