

## Rasmus Nilausen *Eye Dialect*

Team Gallery, New York 24 January – 2 March

The Danish artist's debut outing in New York is a deft, sneakily skilled attempt to prove an uncommon hypothesis: that written punctuation can achieve the status of heroic drama. Along with a painter's more familiar tactics and tricks (messy drips, washy brushstrokes), Nilausen smuggles in an editor's understanding of the gestural power of the parenthesis and quotation mark. Treating the canvas as a page, Nilausen fancies himself a sort of writer – the motif of a disembodied hand bearing a quill recurs throughout – making *Eye Dialect's* eight works read like an essay on what it takes to construct an image.

The best appear deceptively provisional, rough drafts improved by the absence of polish and fuss. *Signorina Buonasera* (all works 2018) is a deep marine-blue rectangle surrounded by a thin red border, two white quotation marks resting at opposing sides of the canvas. If quotation marks are meant to hold language, Nilausen's are happily pointless: this pair bounds an ocean of silence. Buried beneath the blue are the outlines of an earlier, aban-

doned composition. It's hard to make out, but the effaced imagery appears to be a cousin to the nearby *Saliva*, with its tangle of shapes suggesting chopped-off tongues. That work's oblique title speaks volumes: a desire to communicate, and a frustration in the face of the blank and mute.

In *Dorian's Dream* we get more punctuation unmoored from the words it's meant to accent and organise. A mismatched set of parentheses hovers in space – wonkily rendered, more like shoddy chevrons or boomerangs – above three dark circles in a row. Such an ellipsis, in ordinary usage, operates in several ways: it can be used to signify that words have been elided from a quote, or it can act in a more loaded manner, trailing off into ambiguous terrain. (Consider the difference between receiving a text message from a friend that reads 'I'm fine' versus one that reads 'I'm fine...') Here, Nilausen's painterly usage of the ellipsis suggests the latter – a petering out, a shrug, a suggestion to turn the page.

The stunted, writerly allusions are more explicit in *Reflex Edit*, which depicts a blank

'docx' Word file glowing on an enormous screen that is held up by two muscled arms. *Tiziano Said* presents another figure bearing a similarly empty screen, which casts a cone of light across an abstract landscape populated by two anthropomorphic quotation marks (tweaked to resemble a curious set of eyes and a dainty nose). *On Writing II*, the show's tiniest work, is a hand grasping for an old-fashioned ink quill that floats tantalisingly out of reach. And if we're reading this exhibition left to right, as its own sentence, *Ghost Writer* is a fitting period. (Its whited-out ground struggles to fully obscure the apparently failed, original painting beneath it.) Against this cloudy background another hand appears, using a quill to make a single drippy, inexpert line across the canvas. In the end, *Eye Dialect* takes its time in winding up a subtle visual pun (the show's title is itself a layered joke; it's a close cousin to 'idiolect', meaning the idiosyncratic verbal tics a person possesses). Nilausen presents the artist as tongue-tied, totally stuck, yet finding everything he needs in those speechless expanses and pregnant pauses. *Scott Indrisek*



*Reflex Edit*, 2018, oil on linen, 200 × 160 cm.  
Courtesy Team Gallery, New York