

# ARTnews

**reviews:** new york

Jan De Vliegheer

Mike Weiss

Walking into Jan De Vliegheer's show was like visiting an aquarium. The Belgian artist's recent series of nearly phosphorescent paintings depicting colorful, life-size koi (they can grow to three or more feet in length) was curious in its subject matter but nonetheless arresting, executed with vivacity and virtuosity. Swimming in darkness, the koi recalled Julio Cortázar's even odder story, about a character's fixation with axolotls and his subsequent metamorphosis.

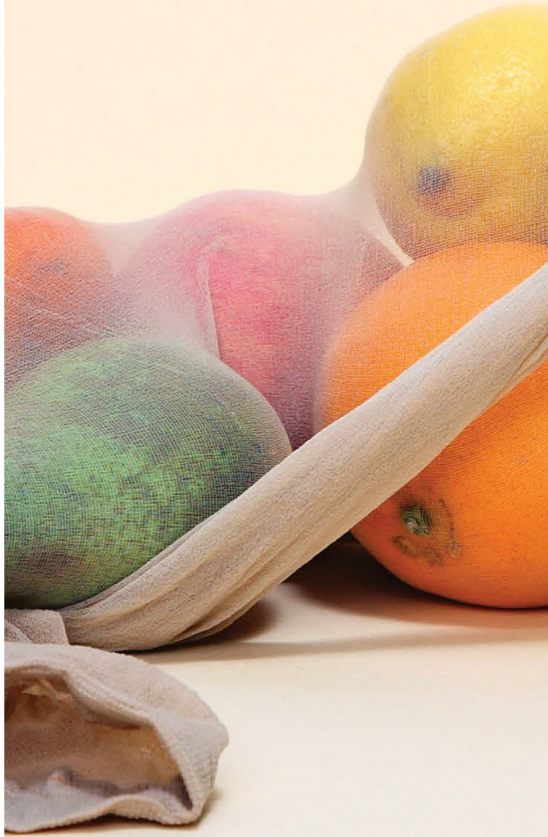
The paintings, large enough to make the experience immersive, channel Monet's scenic repetitions in their obsessive investigation of color and light, although De Vliegheer's koi—Asian symbols of prosperity and perseverance—might have been more effective had the paintings been installed as one continuous work, like Monet's water lilies in the Orangerie in Paris.

But De Vliegheer had other artists in mind, such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, with his fish serving as surrogate brushstrokes or vehicles for brushstrokes, as they twist and turn, flashing through the blackness of De Vliegheer's paintings. At the same time, the fish provide an opportunity to indulge in brilliant oranges, reds, creamy whites, and yellows, and a streak of blue and silvery glints. The whole work shifts between the abstract and the representational, the uncanny and the matter-of-fact, the premeditated and the spontaneous. In movement, the paintings, all 2013 and untitled, mime the explosive trajectories and energies of AbEx canvases, although De Vliegheer completes his pictures in a single session, like a Zen calligrapher, attuned to their breath and the present moment, their exuberance irresistible.

The greatest strength of the works here, however, resided in their materiality, a tribute to the sheer, silky lushness of paint and its undiminished ability to provide pleasure.

—Lilly Wei

## Still Life, Updated



Jan De Vliegheer, *Untitled 14*, 2013