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Toenges' abstractions succeed with excess

By Kenneth Baker

German painter Michael Toenges at Sweetow pushes abstraction to its expressive limits - limits of congestion, not bombast. Rather than strut grand gestures, he heaps small panels - less than a foot square - with oil paint so thick that it nearly becomes unworkable. Surfaces rich in detail result, their articulation growing more from the material than from Toenges' touch. The paintings almost choke on their own sumptuousness, like someone insistent on talking through mouthfuls of food.

Toenges suggests that abstraction today archives objectivity through excess and not, as it once seemed, through cool geometry or poised color harmonies. A very different sense of impersonality informs the photographs of Korean artist Bohnchang Koo. Printed in slightly heightened contrast on rag paper, Koo's pictures record defoliated vines on white stucco walls. They resemble delicate, half-erased graphite drawings.