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PRESS RELEASE

The Errantries of Sarah Almehairi and Bernhard Buhmann

18 SEPTEMBER – 9 NOVEMBER 2024

-- SARAH ALMEHAIRI & BERNHARD BUHMANN

The recent paintings of Sarah Almehairi and Bernhard Buhmann enact profound re-routings. Through unexpected protrusions and punctures, the artists have initiated progressions in their stories that are, as the philosopher Édouard Glissant describes it, “a poetics of errantry,” both adventurous wanderings and rebellious misdirections. Referencing forms and motifs from within their past works, the artists lure us in with the familiar, only to journey to new discoveries and connections. For Almehairi, this process entails a build-up of layers that may weave and collude, but remain—as the series title states—“off centered.” Inversely, within Buhmann’s latest works, an erasure has occurred, and this removal is at times a wound.

Almehairi’s current interest in overlapping appendages amplifies her longstanding awareness that every surface, no matter how flat, is actually sculptural. She works through an intuitive process of marks and layers, and suggests that “aesthetics are a way of thinking.” Her systems of linear measurement are in part related to practices of 20th century minimalism, especially the grids of Agnes Martin, but Almehairi’s measurements never provide a rational conclusion; they instead look at phenomena—roots, weights, silence, the celestial, footsteps—from another perspective, with emphasis on the imperfect and a lack of symmetry. Buhmann is similarly concerned with notions of (im)perfection. Viewing his paintings as evolving characters, his recent works are, as he puts it, a “detox version,” cast out into the world with certain elements removed. His mechanical-biomorphic portraits have here been subjected to tribulations—sickliness, bites, slashes, teardrops—all afflictions that call to mind Buhmann’s sustained interest in Caravaggio.

How do Buhmann and Almehairi reassemble the infinite fragmentations of reality that result from errantries? Tromp l’oeil—or as Glissant would describe it, fugitivity—provides one possibility: painted shadows and torn paper, pictures within pictures, a confusion of gravity and weightlessness, a blurring of foreground and distance. Lines meander, overlap, and abruptly stop, like dismantled timelines of rejected histories. The artists also share a fixation on the possibilities within color gradations, an effect that provides relationships between forms, but also blurs boundaries. The designer Ryan Gerald Nelson has suggested transgressive potentials within the gradient, noting that it “moves, transitions, progresses, defies being defined as one thing. It formalizes difference across a distance.”

And the color palettes of Buhmann and Almehairi have unexpectedly entered into a synchronicity; as Buhmann muses, the mystery of inspiration is an inherent quality of painting, “whether you like it or not.” In this joint installation, we are offered the chance to commune with the beautiful frailties and strange intimacies that can only occur through an unplanned encounter.

-Terri Geis, Associate Professor of Art, New York University Abu Dhabi