

Press Release

## *Saturation*

Han Bing, Wook-Kyung Choi,  
Mandy El-Sayegh, Martha Jungwirth,  
Rachel Jones, Dona Nelson,  
Megan Rooney, Thu-Van Tran

Curator: Oona Doyle

11 June—24 September 2022  
Opening Saturday 11 June, 2pm—6pm

Thaddaeus Ropac  
Paris Pantin  
69 Avenue du Général Leclerc, 93500 Pantin



1. Wook-kyung Choi, *Untitled*, c. 1960s

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*Saturation* brings together two generations of contemporary artists whose works explore new forms of experimental, gestural or lyrical abstraction. Major figures associated with Abstract Expressionism, Martha Jungwirth (b. 1940, Austria), Wook-Kyung Choi (1940–85, Korea) and Dona Nelson (b. 1947, USA), dialogue with a younger generation of artists, Han Bing (b. 1986, China, based in France), Mandy El-Sayegh (b. 1985, Malaysia, based in the UK), Rachel Jones (b. 1991, UK), Megan Rooney (b. 1985, South Africa, based in the UK) and Thu-Van Tran (b. 1979, Vietnam, based in France).

‘Saturation’ refers to the expressive power of colour: in colour theory it describes the highest degree of a colour’s intensity. Saturation also evokes our contemporary condition, characterised by the overflow of information and a feeling of emotional and mental overload, which, according to the sociologist Monique Haicault, particularly affects women. The exhibition thus chooses to present the work of women artists, decentring abstraction from a historically male-dominant perspective.

How does each artist absorb and transform the world around them? How do they react to virtual and urban environments, marked by an economy of attention? A point of saturation is the moment that precedes and triggers overflow. This instant can be identified in the tension and repetitions present in the compositions on display, their condensed and poetic dimension, the superimpositions of paint and materials as well as their chromatic explorations. The overflow that follows can be observed in the bold gestures and spillings, the improvisations, the transformation of materials, the free associations between image and text and the expansion of painting into installation and performance. Through the atmospheric quality of their paintings, certain artists evoke the further meteorological meaning of the term ‘saturation’ – saturated air contains the maximum amount of water vapour.

Each artist presents two to five works, for the most part made for the exhibition, ranging from a six-metre long painting on paper by Martha Jungwirth to more intimate inks by Wook-Kyung Choi. Rachel Jones combines small-scale, unstretched canvases with large landscape formats, while Mandy El-Sayegh expands the scope of her paintings by creating an immersive environment for them. These eight artists are brought together for the first time in the three naves of the Pantin gallery, where colours, shapes and gestures call to each other.



2. Martha Jungwirth, *Australidelphia*, 2020

One of the common threads between the different artists on view is their strong connection to poetry, literature and music, whether it is in the process and manner of painting or as source material. The impulse to express through paint combines with reflections on language, giving way to new forms of lyrical abstraction.



3. Mandy El-Sayegh, *Net-Grid (Orchard)*, 2022

In her installation and paintings, **Mandy El-Sayegh** deconstructs linguistic codes, incorporating sources ranging from newsprint headlines and poetry to Chinese and Arabic calligraphy. Including words such as ‘Orchard’ and ‘Sea Breeze’ that correspond to military operation names, the artist institutes a layering process that reveals how context is diluted through social wordplay. **Wook-Kyung Choi** published two collections of poems (1965 and 1972). In the 1960s, she would at times include her own poems in her paintings as well as newspaper headlines and sayings such as ‘who is the winner of this bloody war’ or ‘careless bitch’, which reference the political and social context of the time. **Martha Jungwirth** cites Vladimir Nabokov’s memoir *Speak Memory* and Greek mythology as sources of inspiration, while her gestural strokes seem to reveal something of the connections between writing and painting; she describes them as ‘seismograms of inner states’. She also records these impressions in her artist books, on view in the exhibition. In her manifesto poem *The Ape in me* (1988), she writes about painting as an intuitive space that exists beyond the formation of recognisable images, ‘before spoken language’. **Megan Rooney** uses poetry as a reflective process. Her impressions, at first glance abstract, hide her imagined narratives. She states: ‘There are always stories buried deep inside a painting’. Poetry is also a point of departure for **Han Bing**, who describes her urban findings as ‘poems by unknown authors’. **Rachel Jones** often collaborates with poets and is deeply influenced by music. Her paintings can be read like musical scores, where lines, colours and textures are repeated in variations. Teeth and mouths are the underlying motifs, symbolically evoking a desire to express. **Thu-Van Tran** investigates colonial history through the literature of Marguerite Duras, Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus to explore the links between identity and language. In her *Colours of Grey* series on view, she creates symbolic connections between colours and historical events.

The exhibition features artists from different cultural backgrounds, several of whom reflect on issues of representation and marginalisation in history and today. Behind the aesthetic experience of the works exhibited, critical and political reflections are revealed, making way for an abstraction that can be described as defiant.

**Mandy El-Sayegh** highlights the ways in which certain cultural narratives and bodies are restricted. Immersed in newspaper, latex, and silkscreened images, El-Sayegh's installation centres around a painted platform roughly the size of a solitary confinement cell. A remnant of her performances, this piece points to an absent body, enclosed in a bruised palette and translucent textures. The surrounding paintings, taken from El-Sayegh's *White Grounds* and *Net-Grid* series, conceal images of wounds and layered ephemera. To enter the installation, viewers must step onto the painted platform, providing a sense of carceral enclosure. Display becomes a mode of agency, allowing invisible bodies to make themselves legible.



4. Thu-Van Tran, *Colors of Grey*, 2022

**Rachel Jones** brings colours to their full intensity with her vibrant palette, electrified by her hatching-like lines and textures drawn with oil pastels and oil sticks. Jones's paintings allow not only for a powerful and emotional aesthetic experience, but also for an exploration of the politics of colour. By colouring the whiteness of teeth with her prismatic palette, Jones seems to counter the dominance of whiteness in the history of painting.

Working with painting but also sculpture, video and installation, **Thu-Van Tran** investigates the concepts of contamination, identity and language, particularly in the context of the colonial history of her native Vietnam. To create her *Colours of Grey*, Tran applies layers of white, pink, blue, green, purple and orange. This choice of colours refers to the so-called 'rainbow' chemicals sprayed by US forces during the Vietnam War in 1965, killing hundreds of thousands of people and contaminating the environment for decades.

Influenced by Korean Art Informel and American Abstract Expressionism, in **Wook-Kyung Choi's** forceful, rhythmic compositions from the 1960s, line and colour surge to create uprising movements. Her paintings demonstrate the artist's emotional

sensitivity and her social conscience. Choi, who was involved in the anti-war and anti-racist social movements in the United States in the 1960s, spoke about the difficulty of finding a place for herself as an exiled painter in the United States in a male-dominated artistic circle.

**Megan Rooney** explores how colours are associated with memory, and how they can be employed to convey shifts between contrasting emotions. Her paintings seem to absorb her surroundings with heightened sensitivity. The artist states: 'Every painting made is affected by the temperature of the light, the colours of the sky on that particular day.' This meteorological aspect is reflected in 'the innumerable phases that each painting goes through'. Her palette, which includes soft hues that reference North American suburbia, domestic space and gardens, playfully reappropriates normalised codes of femininity.

**Martha Jungwirth's** compositions on brown paper, some of which are nearly six metres long, demonstrate the artist's eruptive style and a colour palette that is very personal to her, composed of vermilion, pink and purple. In the 1960s, Martha Jungwirth was the only woman in the Viennese collective Wirklichkeiten (Realities). Since then, she has continued to develop an innovative visual language marked by her exploration of colour and her incisive lines. To create her works, which are poised between chance and calculation, Jungwirth draws on political events, literature and Greek mythology, which become triggers for fleeting impulses.

**Dona Nelson's** recent two-sided *Stain Paintings* are exhibited on stands in the Pantin space rather than hung on the wall, allowing for a sculptural view of painting. Working en plein air, Nelson paints on both sides of the canvas, using buckets of paint, spatulas and high pressure hoses as well as cheesecloth. Subtle patterns emerge from the repeated soaking of water and paint. Although the strokes seem gestural, they are indirect, emerging primarily from the materials. For Nelson, 'the image is in the canvas'.



5. Dona Nelson, *And The Sun Went Down*, 2019



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For **Han Bing**, 'painting is a way of resisting the information that is forced on us'. She deconstructs pictorial reality in her work, opening up new dimensions and gradually moving towards abstraction. Having recently settled in Paris, she is inspired by the textures and patterns that appear in the city, especially the 'errors' and 'glitches' generated by ripped posters. She carefully works each canvas with oil paint, playing with the combination of colours, adding spray paint, integrating accidental lines, letting the dynamic of the work guide the composition.

Abstraction is a process of transformation of the world where the references to visible reality are indirect or deconstructed. Through their conceptual and sensory exploration of colour, their reflection on language and their expression of social and critical views, the artists exhibited in *Saturation* filter and transform a reality marked by dispersal and overload. Rather than 'extract' or 'simplify', the concept of saturation allows us to look at abstraction as a way to intensify.



6. Han Bing, *The Apartment*, 2022

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#saturation

**1. Wook-kyung Choi**, *Untitled*, c. 1960s. Acrylic on canvas. 107 x 86 x 2.5 cm (42.13 x 33.86 x 0.98 in). © Wook-kyung Choi Estate and Kukje Gallery Courtesy of the estate and Kukje Gallery. Photo: Charles Duprat. **2. Martha Jungwirth**, *Australidelphia*, 2020. Oil on paper on canvas. 241.5 x 330.9 x 2.6 cm. © Martha Jungwirth / Bildrecht, Wien 2022. Photo: Ulrich Ghezzi. Courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London · Paris · Salzburg · Seoul. **3. Mandy El-Sayegh**, *Net-Grid (Orchard)*, 2022. Oil and mixed media on canvas with silkscreened collaged elements. 235 x 225 x 4.5 cm (92.52 x 88.58 x 1.77 in). © Mandy El-Sayegh. Photo: Charles Duprat. Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac, London · Paris · Salzburg · Seoul. **4. Thu-Van Tran**, *Colors of Grey*, 2022. Pigment and medium on cotton and linen canvas. 160 x 220 cm (62.99 x 86.61 in). Photo: Charles Duprat. Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac, London · Paris · Salzburg · Seoul. **5. Dona Nelson**, *And The Sun Went Down*, 2019. Acrylic paint and acrylic mediums on canvas with painted wood stretcher and steel stand (two-sided). 123.5 x 213 x 25.4 cm (48.625 x 83.875 x 10 in) **6. Han Bing**, *The Apartment*, 2022. Acrylic and oil on linen. 143 x 177.8 x 2.5 cm (56.3 x 70 x 0.98 in). Photo: Charles Duprat. Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac, London · Paris · Salzburg · Seoul.