

Press Release

Embodied Forms: Painting Now

Carolina Aguirre, Dean Fox, Olga Grotova,
Michael Ho, Effie Wanyi Li, YaYa Yajie Liang
and Eva Helene Pade

Curated by Kitty Gurnos-Davies

2—28 September 2024
Opening Monday 2 September 2024, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Ely House, 37 Dover Street, London, W1S 4NJ



Eva Helene Pade, *Dansen*, 2024. Oil on canvas. 210 x 300 cm (82.68 x 118.11 in).

Art is the language of sensations.

— Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Embodied Forms: Painting Now brings together new works by seven artists who reconfigure the relationship between subjectivity and the body, interrogating how its complexities are given form in painting today. Encompassing diverse material, stylistic and conceptual approaches, the exhibition features works by a group of international artists: **Carolina Aguirre, Dean Fox, Olga Grotova, Michael Ho, Effie Wanyi Li, YaYa Yajie Liang** and **Eva Helene Pade**. Themes emerge and commingle across the exhibition, with the relationship between bodies and their environments – whether narrative and/or painterly – standing at the fore.

While figurative traditions run as a rich seam through art history, today art has become an essential means for reimagining how embodiment is expressed and perceived. Embodiment intimately entwines the corporeal with the emotional, the psychological and the sensory, and makes apparent our interconnections with other forces – be they human, animal, ecological or technological. The body is no longer conceived as a self-contained object. Its borders have become porous, or have evaporated entirely, to propose new ways of inhabiting the world rooted in collaboration and kinship.

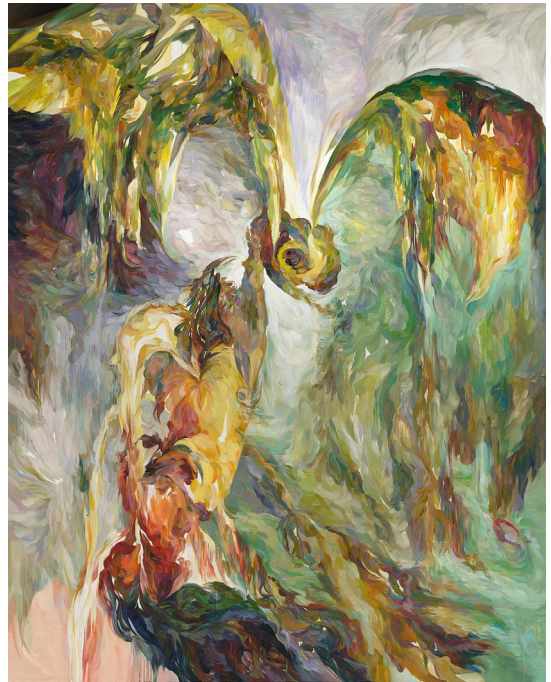
Art history stands as a point of departure for **Eva Helene Pade** (b.1997; Odense, Denmark) and her robust paintings of female figures. Responding to a lineage of Northern European figurative artists, including Edvard Munch and Otto Dix, she investigates the complexities of human relationships and the multiplicity of subjectivity in open-ended narratives. The female nude is reimagined – not as object, image or sign – but as a site of empowered agency as the mythological is fused with a distinctly contemporary treatment of bodily form. Faces stare out defiantly from the canvases, emerging from fluid compositions to confront the audience. Elsewhere, they turn to one another in camaraderie. Limbs multiply and dissolve into rich, jewel-toned strokes of paint, extending a sense of the self beyond the body. Described by Pade as a ‘surrender to the more metaphysical parts of the paintings,’ these passages push the works beyond the figurative towards the transcendental as she proposes a new painterly approach to depicting female embodiment today.



Dean Fox, *The Journey after Gauguin*, 2024.
Oil on canvas. 200 x 300 cm (78.75 x 118.11 in).
Photo: Ben Westoby. Courtesy of the artist and Matt Carey-Williams.

In turn, **Dean Fox** (b.1979; London, UK) seeks to render our perception of the world unfamiliar through his interrogation of the very praxis of painting. For the exhibition, he revisits paintings by the French Post-Impressionists Édouard Vuillard and Paul Gauguin. He composes digital collages that dissect and reassemble elements of the original works in new compositions, which he then translates onto canvas in oil. Reimagined within his own distinctive painterly language, the alluring works play with perspective to elide distinctions between

foreground and background, the human subject and their environment. Just as the Post-Impressionists explored the potential of painting as a technology to replace objective representation with subjective experience, Fox reflects the ever-shifting and unfixed nature of our contemporary world through his intervention in the painterly tradition.



YaYa Yajie Liang, *Circle Dance*, 2024.
Oil on canvas.
200 x 160 cm (78.74 x 62.99 in).

Across the layers of her intricately painted compositions, **YaYa Yajie Liang** (b.1995; Henan, China) interrogates the enmeshment of the body and its environment on an intimate scale. For Liang, painting is a collaborative act directed as much by the paint, brush and canvas as her own embodied instincts. She depicts the body in metamorphosis. Short, dynamic brushstrokes swirl across the canvases to push and pull the painting between figuration and abstraction, imbuing the works with an inherent sense of movement, as though they are living ecosystems in perpetual transformation. Following philosopher Jane Bennett, she conceives of a shared ‘vibrant matter’ that enlivens the world, breaking down binary distinctions between the organic and inorganic, human and animal, self and other, as well as the artist and their materials. Questioning these categories, she fosters queer ecologies that propose alternate ways of being in kinship with the natural world, and how they might be given form through artistic expression.



Effie Wanyi Li, *Wind Seen from Mind's Eye*, 2024.
Oil on canvas, diptych. 180 x 280 cm (70.87 x 110.24 in).

Also seeking to dissolve distinctions between internal and external states of being, **Effie Wanyi Li** (b.1995; Shenzhen, China) takes up the act of painting to materialise visceral landscapes in which psychological and emotional impulses are entwined with physical sensation. Through her use of high-contrast shadow and highlight, Li creates a sense of perspectival depth to spatialise her embodied experiences on canvas. Articulated in fleshy, bruised palettes, biomorphic structures suggest the forms of internal organs, even while they twist and metamorphose into topographical features and floral motifs. Our eye is directed across the surface of the works by lines that weave through these knotted forms, navigate the deep voids that recede into the distance and brush across the whispering tendrils that give form to Li's conception of embodied experience.



Carolina Aguirre, *Muddy murmur*, 2024.
Sumi ink, charcoal, shellac ink and natural pigment on wood panels, diptych.
180 x 250 cm (70.87 x 98.43 in).

Interrogating experiences of belonging, **Carolina Aguirre** (b.1990; Santiago, Chile) brings ambiguous terrains into being using a repertoire of natural inks, shellac and organic pigments. These materials coalesce on the surface of her wood supports to suggest shifting geological landscapes from which body parts and narrative clues emerge and dissolve. Misty imprints of the artist's own body frame this entanglement of the human and natural worlds within an autoethnographic lens. Working on the floor, Aguirre likens the painting process to 'excavating' or 'gardening', at times incising directly into the wood panels to cultivate open-ended narratives that hold myriad expressions of belonging and generational memories of migration.



Olga Grotova, *Swaddle*, 2024.
Hematite, natural pigments, photograms and oil on linen.
220 x 170 cm (86.61 x 66.93 in).

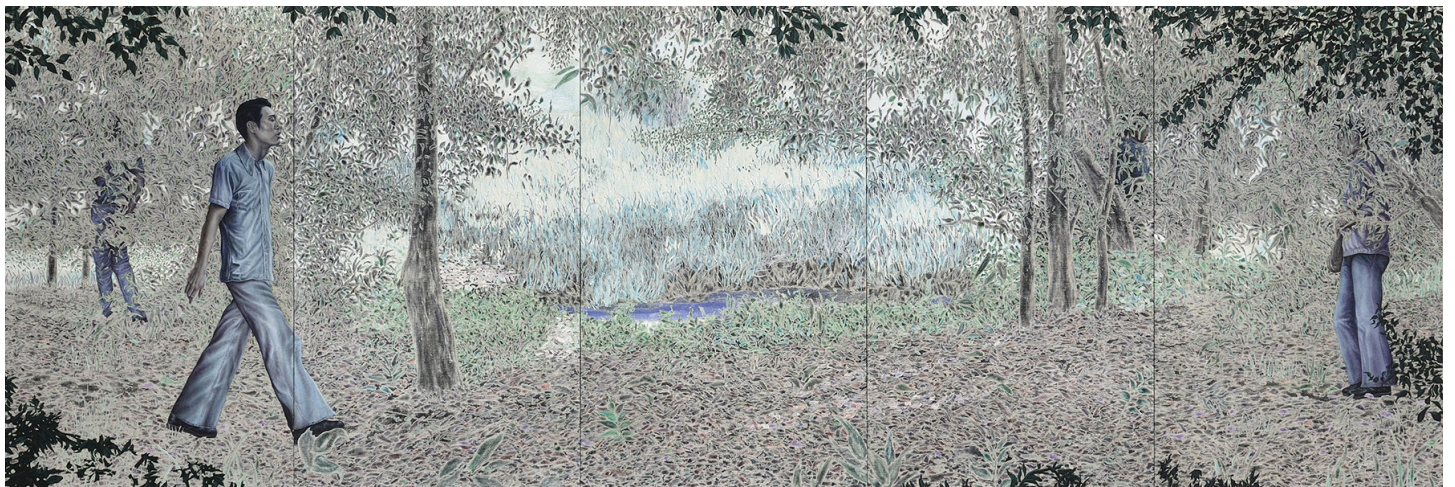
Intergenerational narratives also sit at the heart of **Olga Grotova's** (b.1986; Chelyabinsk, Russia) heavily researched practice. She uncovers overlooked experiences of Soviet and Eastern European women who, like her own German-Soviet family, have been erased from established historical records. In her canvases the body becomes a site through which she pays testament to these absences. Working with cameraless photography, she creates photograms that produce shadow-like traces of her and her mother's bodies, which are then fragmented in densely layered

compositions. In the paintings, Grotova and her mother's forms intersect with those of dried flowers and railway maps, as well as natural pigments and soil, all derived from locations directly connected to the histories she tells. Through this process of fragmentation, reassembly and abstraction, Grotova removes hierarchical distinctions between the subject and object to consider how the natural world bears witness to human experience.

Taking a more directly representational approach to the body, **Michael Ho** (b.1991; Arnhem, Netherlands) relocates his interrogation of embodied experience to otherworldly natural landscapes populated by ghostly figures. He undertakes a physically intense process of pushing acrylic paint through from the back of unprimed canvases to create abstracted leaf-like patterns upon which he articulates his figures in oil paint. Fusing elements of Chinese and European landscape traditions, he describes his forested worlds as 'liminal' sites in which to explore East Asian diasporic identities. His figures

feature in ambiguous narratives illuminated by a distinctive purple-grey crepuscular light. Often partially concealed by foliage or shown in acts of discovery, they speak to the wider notions of cultural belonging and (re)discovery that underpin Ho's practice. 'I found a sense of belonging in that in-between space,' he explains, referring to his own experience as a queer, second-generation Chinese immigrant who grew up in Northern Europe. In the monumental five-panel work on view, which extends to six-and-a-half metres in length, he paints his figures on a one-to-one scale, inviting visitors to immerse themselves as participant-voyeurs in the landscape laid out before them.

Embodied Forms invites us to move between these metamorphosing bodies, corporeal interiors and liminal landscapes brought into being across the works of the seven artists – prompting us to consider how we situate ourselves as embodied subjects in the world. — Kitty Gurnos-Davies, curator



Michael Ho, *Schatten um Schatten am Rande des Abends*, 2024.
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 5 panels.
220 x 650 cm (86.61 x 255.91 in).

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