

## The Brooklyn Rail Andrea Marie Breiling: *Swallowtail*

By Amanda Millet-Sorsa, May 2023



Installation view: Andrea Marie Breiling: *Swallowtail*, Almine Rech, New York, 2023.  
Courtesy Almine Rech. Photo: Dan Bradica.

We have the pleasure of experiencing new work by Andrea Marie Breiling at Almine Rech's uptown New York location in their two main galleries. There are four paintings in each room: the main gallery, back gallery, and connecting hallway. Their cinematic and stage-like scale is entirely made with spray paint applied with swooping gestures, like the swallow's flight path as the exhibition's title, *Swallowtail*, suggests. The larger-than-life repeated, curvilinear lines are evocative of the movement of a living creature and swift navigator of the skies. We can hear a swish, a swoop, a zoom among the cross-hatchings and visual sound vibrations interspersed with silence, evasion and collision, and moments of bright light and darkness. Does this scale connect us to an intimate and magnified moment, such as the wings of a butterfly, close-up, or does it give us the sensation of being as small as a butterfly moving about the monstrosity of nature?

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Another curious element is that each painting is made with spray paint. Though we can experience some texture coming up from the ground on the support and brushstrokes coated in a layer of shiny enamels, most of the spray areas are smooth, light, and airy, as is the character of aerosol paints. Though we would generally associate this medium in recent decades with bespoke graphic and fantasy images painted on metallic vehicles (automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles), Breiling's paintings are far from this sense of machinery and somehow closer to nature. Likewise, spray paint evokes a dialogue with a large outdoor public, as the imagery and lettering of graffiti is used with impulse, speed and ease on the chaos of urban walls, sidewalks, buildings, and signs. It can be understood as a sense of the joy or freedom of transient expression or frustration that interacts both with the world and the elements. We still experience the shiny enamel of the material, yet these paintings feel calm, slow, and sensitive in their touch. The curved lines sit layered on air droplets of paint, at times thick and dense, like in *Saoirse Bell (2023)*, and other times a gradation of pointillist dots so infinitesimal, we liken it to light particles dispensed through smoke as in *Swallowtail (2023)*. The curve's build up is visible and transparent akin to superimposed images in experimental photography. We can also recall Hedda Sterne's paintings from the 1950s, where she experimented with this new medium on canvas once it was readily available for common use in hardware stores that same decade. She likened the speed of the material to the speed of abstracted highway landscapes.

Though the curvilinear lines converge and collide from multiple angles, *Side by Side (2023)* suggests a duality of image. We see the black fusion at the center act as a divider to the near symmetry on its sides flanked by ice blue and dark violet lines rippling in and out from the center. Each edge of the sprayed curve starts thick on one side and then diminishes its density slowly, its opposite side disappearing and transforming into the effervescence of freshly poured champagne. The abstract atmospheres envisioned by Breiling are cosmic in nature, perhaps nocturnal, and their pictorial unity envelops us in a meditation from brightness to darkness. The fluorescent, glow-in-the-dark green of *Pipevine (2023)* evokes the bright butts of fireflies as much as the glow sticks of ravers waving in the darkness of the places they dance in and where they feel the most uninhibited.

Breiling's language has brought us closer to being immersed in something larger than our physical selves such as a sound environment, or the immenseness of nature if we imagine ourselves to be a butterfly in flight, or urban rhythms that when weaved together stop and stand still, making its chaos suddenly organized and meditative. We're surprised by the simplicity of the chosen material, only spray paint, and its capacity to transcend into painterly abstraction through the artist as a vehicle, shedding its transitory adolescence, and freeing it from its graphic past.