ALMINE RECH

Jean-Baptiste Bernadet
Pollen

Apr 15 — May 20, 2023 | Paris, Turenne (Front Space)

Almine Rech Paris is pleased to present Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's fifth solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from April 15 to May 20, 2023.

A distinctive colorist, painter of pure sensation, Bernadet elaborates an atmospheric cosmos in each canvas, in which nature, emotion, and psyche take center stage "play the leading roles". Three new *Fugues*, additions to one of his most famous series of paintings, punctuate the gallery space. Within these boundless all-over paintings, patterns and images appear and crystallize, then vanish as they come together in infinite new combinations, offering viewers a lasting retinal experience of vertiginous intensity. Incandescent shades of orange, full and frank purples, sulfuric yellows, deep grays, and melancholic pale greens come forward; they seem to dominate the surface of his canvases in a precise geography, then retreat into the distance.

In their singular chromatic relationships, the colors of Bernadet's *Fugues* multiply focal points almost to infinity, to create a pictorial space without hierarchy, where every element vibrates and becomes vaporous, suspended in time. The starting point in the creation of each painting, composed of a proliferation of brushstrokes, is often an accident, which later reaches an equilibrium between improvisation, anticipation, and a deliberate mechanical aspect, unmoored from any attempt to communicate through gesture.

Bernadet's paintings are abstract, clearly. But perhaps not entirely. They exist somewhere subtle between abstraction and landscape painting. You might discern a sunset, or its reflection in the surface of water, iridescent skies captured at different times of the day, in changing seasons, such as the Impressionists might have painted.

Bernadet has chosen two new bronze sculptures to accompany his latest *Fugues*, of branches of a lemon tree, a series begun in 2022. Evoking both the sensory memory of a Mediterranean landscape and the indescribable feeling of love, they call to mind the vanities of a still life as much as a detail from a history or landscape painting. As if caressed by an imaginary wind, the branches, leaves and fruits, with their golden and brown hues, weave a narrative in which the artist's own experiences are intertwined with ancient tales. Beyond the significant choice of a bright yellow citrus fruit, with its ambivalent taste, juicy yet acidic, these sculptures evoke in turn hedonism, the golden apples of the fabulous orchard of the Hesperides, offerings of laurel wreaths intended for Roman gods and poets, or even a homage to a loved one—as their titles suggest (*For the Boy with Golden Hair*, *For The Boy with Liquid Eyes*). While the variation in tones of oxidation of the material and the discreet polychromy added by the artist merge together at first glance, these deliberately raw, unpatinated, golden bronzes move away from a desire for veracity by disclosing the welds of their assembly and the succession of gestures that brought them into being.

In this constant shifting movement from abstraction to realism and back again, Bernadet's painting tends toward an abstract naturalism, led by the elasticity of time. The principle of series and suites is integral to his practice: each piece is an integral part of a dynamic whole, they echo one another, following an art of variation that is reminiscent of baroque music's intrinsic structure. Like the weaving of a Proustian cathedral, embracing the slow accumulation of a work-in-progress, each brushstroke is a substantial fragment of a painting, and each painting represents a fraction of Bernadet's total body of work.

Encountering Bernadet's work, the gaze, at once insistent and fleeting, melancholy and celebratory, overflows with emotion, envisioned here as a succession of feelings, a patchwork of reminiscences and romantic introspections, vertiginous feelings kindled by the fleetingness of time. In his intimate relationship to memory and his deep desire to transcend linear time, Bernadet's oeuvre connects with the spirit of Proust. And if the aim of this pictorial endeavor is to address painting itself, his work gives viewers immense freedom, the liberty to project their own experiences onto it.

- Charles Barachon, critic and writer