ALMINE RECH

Sasha Ferré
Toccata

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Almine Rech is pleased to present 'Toccata', French artist Sasha Ferré's first solo show with the gallery.

Sasha Ferré does not see her paintings. Or at least she cannot see them when she is working: her hands are full of colours, she is fully immersed in the act of blending oils and caressing the material she handles. Sasha Ferré does not see her paintings, and yet she only works in the daytime as she craves natural light. From what she told me about her creative process, my understanding is that she performs a sort of daytime ritual which consists of coating the surface of a linen canvas with an initial layer of coloured tempera before covering the background with greasy pigmented matter. Issues of depth, and therefore dimensions, are already at stake. All of her work must take place in the space of a day - a rule dictated by the physical properties of oil paint, which also gives Sasha Ferré's work a conceptual nature (the canvas as *unity of time*). Her ritual is soundtracked by music, and you can't help but feel compelled to imagine what beats and melodies may have sounded across the studio while the artist was composing her latest works.

In the studio, everything takes place on the floor. The artist works squatting, on all fours, in an almost erotic relationship where the canvas is skin and the paint is flesh. At this stage, stepping back is impossible: Sasha Ferré is absorbed by her colours. When I asked about her body position, she talked about a speculative history of painting, beyond the idea of perspective, subject or style, more focused on studying the distance between the canvas and the artist's hand, an approach where the paintbrush might be seen as a distancing instrument. She added that some major 20th century painters who had chosen to free themselves from the paintbrush still kept that distance, as was the case with Jackson Pollock – who touched neither paint nor canvas – or Yves Klein, who painted his *Anthropometries* through the intermediary of naked women (thus serving as both models and brushes). Sasha Ferré, conversely, deliberately chose to abolish all distance and renounced paintbrushes entirely in 2020.

The abolition of distance between her hands, the colour and the canvas is an aesthetic statement that has formal repercussions – traces of the artist's fingers and hands visibly emerge when you come closer to her paintings – but also an ethical one. The idea is to place hapticality – the ability to touch and allow yourself to be touched – at the heart of the painting process. Sasha Ferré's *tour de force* is that she successfully reveals painting that *touches* upon nature not by seeking to depict it but to let it be *felt*. The artist lives in the gap between landscape and abstract painting, where she unfolds a world of foliage, waves, flames and corals that we can no longer see but would once more need to learn to touch (beyond our endless screen-scrolling). The titles of her works equally bear witness to her endeavour. Picked up from British poet Alice Oswald's collections *Falling Awake* (2016) and *Nobody: A Hymn to the Sea* (2019), they amplify the "sensuous ecology" aspect of Sasha Ferré's work (to give but one example: *Closer and closer to the ground*, 2023).

The material Sasha Ferré works with is greasy. The paint she uses doesn't come from pots or tubes, but in the form of oil sticks (she started using them in 2017), which she first brings together (her orchestra-palette) before spreading them across the canvas. The gesture may seem primitive, but it should be noted that Sasha Ferré actually takes great care in fading the colours and letting the light shine through, endowing her compositions with complex dimensions and conveying a strong sense of movement. In addition, "Toccata" - the name the artist chose for her show - is also significant in many ways. It refers to a composition style specific to Baroque music and applied to various instruments (essentially keyboards, but not only); the term comes from the Italian for *touched* in the feminine form. So-called toccata pieces generally emphasize "contact" with the instrument. Toccata originally encouraged improvisation, and has taken many different forms over the centuries. The title certainly underscores the tactile and rhythmic qualities of Sasha Ferré's work, but it also invites the viewer to *listen* to the colours of her paintings rather than just *look* at them. The artist's work thus echoes the words of German biologist and philosopher Andreas Weber in his book *Matter and desire: an erotic ecology* (2017):

"The world is not an aggregation of things, but rather a symphony of relationships between many participants that are altered by the interaction: a necessarily erotic occurrence" (p. 29)

— Cédric Fauq

1. The conversation with Sasha Ferré took place on 21 July 2023, in her studio, at a time when the pieces for the show had already been produced.

2. See the work of David Abram, especially The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World, Vintage Books, New York, 1997, translated by D. Demorcy.

3. The original sentence reads: "The world is not an aggregation of things, but rather a symphony of relations between many participants that are modified by interaction: a necessarily erotic event.