ALMINE RECH

Leelee Kimmel
The Wilds and the Shore

May 7 — Jun 15, 2024 | New York

Almine Rech New York is pleased to present *The Wilds and the Shore,* Leelee Kimmel's third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from May 7 to June 15, 2024.

Leelee Kimmel continues in the refinement of a certain sort of abstract painting. But that word seems uneasy, correct but subtly off. What sort of refinement is this, or elaboration, or even "study"— the anodyne quality of that word is deliberate. Kimmel is outside of fashion: not so much as a whisper of personal experience or life story, no appeal to identity, that skeleton key to all living myths and histories, omnipresent and deader than the Rev. Casuabon's hopeless attempt to find the key to all mythology. But keeping within the conspectus of the Victorian novel, nothing is more perversely animated, more plastic with eldritch innovation, than what is dead: Dracula, Frankenstein, and a comically replete world of unquiet spirits. Kimmel would be uninterested in pursuing the Matisse idea of art, that beautiful armchair — but no one shirks Matisse, that's just wrong and rude. But she doesn't do that trip. Luxe, calme, et volupté — well Kimmel's paintings have a luxurious quality, even a voluptuous one; but they're very seldom calm.

Kimmel works within a very well known history of postwar painting: Abstract Expressionism. And yet her paintings don't look much or anything like those produced by First- and Second-generation Abstract Expressionists, the habitués of the Cedar Tavern, the gristle and sinew of the Tenth Street School. For such a stereotypically "masculine" and "tough guy" stratosphere, a lot of the guys underperform as *real men*. Jackson Pollock: a male hysteric with all manner of expressed of repressed and mockingly, amusingly displayed homoerotic "tendencies". Franz Kline: adorable but likewise a patent mess. That these paragons of Action Painting and The Triumph of American Painting aren't regular guys is hardly surprising. They're self-created edifices of compromised, failed, hopeless masculinity if anything, but how vulgar to talk this way. The guys guys in this orchidaceous-hot realm were the women: Lee Krasner and Joan Mitchell, Elaine de Kooning and Grace Hartigan: they all unsex themselves after the manner of early radical feminist Lady Macbeth. Perhaps it's fitting that among contemporary painters, certain women are their most vital descendants, keeping the shop of the forties and fifties open today and ever young: Julie Mehretu, Cecily Brown, Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, and Kimmel; resisting the vulgar or maybe just way overdone and shopworn identity ideology of making and being. Unsexed. Not having it. Defiantly pissed off.

An intense even overwhelming physicality bursts through many of Kimmel's paintings. Again, love Matisse we really aren't worthy—but that luxurious armchair or maybe wing chair overbearing and *powerful* to use that stupid word we admit we love. Waves of color, seismic ruptures, tectonic wrecks, tsunamis of pigment, dusts storms: so much weather and often inclement. But naufrage delivers even better sensation in art than paysage bourgeois and The World of Interiors. The Sublime:

"Both the Sublime and the Beautiful induce a state of submission that is often combined with the possibility of getting lost. They disorientate and undermine purpose. In one of several erotic sections in the Enquiry Burke describes the experience of looking at a beautiful woman's body: it is, he writes, like a 'deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye glides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried.'"

— Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful

And from the same:

"Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling....When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience."

— David Rimanelli, art critic