ALMINE RECH

Aurélie Gravas
My Virgin Skin on Yours

Sep 3 — 20, 2024 | Paris, Turenne (Front Space)

Almine Rech Paris Turenne, Front Space is pleased to present *My Virgin Skin on Yours*, Aurélie Gravas first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from September 3 to 21, 2024.

In the Brussels studio of Aurélie Gravas, we find countless lyrical encounters. There, on the canvas, the painter combines all her primary forms and her primal forces with the colors she loves and the materials she never ceases to explore. From these gentle cohabitations there emerge recurring and obsessive motifs: birds, fish, flowers, and most of all, faces. Faces with no subjects extend over the entire canvas, inviting landscapes, wind, and many pure emotions.

The forms confuse us at first as we hesitate, remaining in uncertainty and unable to choose between anxiety and joy. This mirrors the artist's own tensions, questions, and perpetual quest: tears or flames, fish or eye, clouds or fingers, curtains or hair? The black line precisely defines and describes. Soft or bright colors then infuse all their light, all their energy. Gradually, faces emerge and appear. They are complex, multiple, ambivalent. They may display several emotions, sometimes with opposing sensations. The faces are mysterious and enchanting. Aurélie Gravas is never definitive, never representational: her painting gives us free rein. It is up to us to see everything; it's our turn to play.

"I am not alone when I paint," explains Aurélie Gravas, who, after studying art at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Marseille and also studying law, decided she wanted to move to Brussels. "My paintings are like a people to me." In the studio, the faces correspond to each other, complement each other, dialogue with each other. We can imagine them at night, in the darkness, whispering from one canvas to the next, and finding their freedom, like statues leaving their pedestals. The art of painting binds them together. It is like an unsuspected link, a shared affinity for liberty.

What secret harmony unites this tribe? Spontaneously, we think of movement. Behind the simplest gestures — a girl plays with a yo-yo, another stirs the wind with her fan, someone stares at the view, eyelids are closing, a bird is gently caught, another seems about to fly away, a black tulip blooms — Aurélie Gravas's art becomes alive and connected. To find the leitmotif here, we must search in the painter's other passion: music, which she has performed as part of a trio for 10 years. "Music allowed my painting to shed the narrative element," she says.

Like a sweeping, liberating gesture, music mingles with these paintings and their movements. Even if she paints in silence, Aurélie Gravas merges music with her art: for the opening of her first exhibition at the Almine Rech Gallery in Paris, she and her group will perform among the artworks. This breaks down boundaries a little more, removing the borders of her creative activity.

When asked about her inspirations, Aurélie Gravas has many informed references and beloved guides, from the colors of Bram Van Velde to the fish of Braque or the faces of Alexej von Jawlensky. But there is also the philosophy of Levinas. The philosopher of alterity sees in the face of the Other a way of discovering this person's humanity by looking, feeling, and interacting. Instead of the confining act of possession, the philosopher advocates the caress, a light touch that does not know what it seeks—and therefore can find everything.

Aurélie Gravas paints while caressing. Her movements are flowing, spontaneous; they give rise to these faces of otherness while allowing them to appear as they are, to find themselves, to remain open. She often mentions the word “panim,” which Levinas borrowed from Hebrew and which means “faces,” always in the plural, with no singular form. On her canvases, each element, in all its uniqueness, finds a tempo, a rhythm, a connection, as if to better yoke itself to the collective, to the whole. This gentle strangeness revealed by the caress of the paintbrush is what draws us close to her art and her music. It’s this free, spontaneous symphony that is the foundation of Aurélie Gravas’s painting.

- Boris Bergmann, art critic