ALMINE RECH

Chloe Wise
Not That We Don't

Apr 10 — May 18, 2019 | London

Almine Rech London is pleased to present the second exhibition of Chloe Wise with the gallery and her first in London, opening April 10th, 2019.

In *Not That We Don't*, Wise continues her exploration into portraiture, landing on the unspoken dynamics that maintain the individual's participation amongst the group, allowing for their seemingly fluid existence in society. Placed within a space of ambiguity, Wise's subjects flirt with legibility; their gathering suggesting a familiar event such as a party, theatrical production, or a yearbook photo, only to deny the grounds for any such staged communion.

The new suite of paintings examine the vital and voluntary social rituals permitting collective harmony. Populated portraits are composed in rainbow hues, cheekily calling to mind the aesthetics of performed inclusivity that colored Benetton ads and scholastic material of the artist's childhood. A recurrent cast of sitters appears and disappears in dynamic poses, across multiple canvases and compositions. Within the confines of these paintings, severed floating hands outnumber faces. And if we generally rely on facial expressions to interpret emotional states, the continued exclusion of faces imbues the gesticulating extremities with psychic vigor. Painted with deft precision, these disembodiments tacitly hold multiple meanings: is an outstretched pointer finger decrying or approving? Is the hand resting on that shoulder supportive or oppressive? Do entwined fingers belong to an obedient cult member or a patient dinner party guest?

Throughout her work, Wise's sitters share a stage with a medley of recognizable goods, codifying their contemporaneity. In this series, subjects are framed alongside diverse products of sanitization - from disinfectant to Saran wrap. Speaking to their ethnographic corollary in 1954, Roland Barthes posited that the advertisement of soaps and other "purifying products" covertly enforced a violent eradication of threatening entities. Soap, for Barthes, was no different than other value-based institutions in which we are asked to place our trust, like religion or state; refuges which protect us from the threat of abjection, impurity, and chaos. And while the lush environments of Wise's paintings signal the comfort of cleanliness, the appearance of Kleenex or Purell speaks to a violence festering below the surface should one not adhere to implied regulation. The commingling of multiple persons and detergents is a reminder of the implicit management that enables cooperation to extend into control.

A further sense of alarm is signaled by the engorged stature of Wise's chosen figures, looming in an imposing and disquieting manner. With mouths agape and unwavering eye contact, their expressions are arrested at moments suggestive of their desire to break with their pose, or beckoning us to look away. While the magnetic quality of the paintings command our complete attention, gawking eventually activates discomfort. The viewer is confronted with the perpetual oscillation between seduction and repulsion in face of these figures, speaking to the dichotomy between the active and passive, viewer and object.

Loreta Lamargese