

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

Press release
March 2019

Sara Hughes
March 22 to April 14, 2019
Sheng Zhi Space, 798 Art Zone, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is delighted to participate in Gallery Weekend Beijing with a solo exhibition by American artist Sara Hughes. This occasion marks Hughes' first solo presentation in Asia.

Hughes' new paintings further develop what she refers to as invented or psychological landscapes. These landscapes do not depict real places but rather are created from the inside; an inside that is strongly informed by a deep knowledge of art history, as well as the work of contemporary peers. Her frenetic colors and vibrant brushstrokes, vivid lines, heavily applied marks, and monochromatic fields bring to mind fin de siècle styles, such as Fauvism, Art Nouveau, or German Expressionism. Her paintings also bear traces of contemporary artists, namely Carroll Dunham, Sanya Kantarovsky, and David Hockney.

The paintings on display were created in a non-linear way, yet they are linked by motifs and approaches leading into a new body of work. Large and small paintings accompany and contrast each other, both depicting landscapes from different perspectives. Hughes usually starts the larger, more detailed paintings in a playful way – not by following a certain idea, but by employing a variety of techniques and styles to create a pictorial cosmos in which discontinuous parts complete and complement one another. The stark contrasts and myriad alternating styles do not let the eye rest and leave the viewer with a feeling of urgency, fastness, and even anxiety. A More Linear Current, for example, shows waves which are, individually seen, too different to form a coherent seascape. However, their precise composition and balanced saturation create a whole and do not allow the eye to wander.

In contrast to this, the smaller paintings create a quieter tension, letting the eye slow down. As if the process of painting was crystallized in the work itself, the decisions in these paintings were made at a much slower pace than those in the larger paintings. The difference between the two formats can be understood metaphorically: It is as if one had zoomed out of the larger paintings, only to find "the bigger picture" in the smaller paintings showing less detail. Nevertheless, they hold the viewer's attention and appear to contain a secret. Touch of Day leads the viewer through a valley onto the open sea. To the left and right, the painting is framed by sheer mountains, creating the impression of being surrounded by even higher mountains in a seemingly narrow space. This almost claustrophobic experience links the zoomed-out landscapes to the detailed ones through their dynamic line making and vital coloring.

A recurrent motif in this exhibition is that of trees. In Hughes' paintings, they are almost anthropomorphized, becoming figures. The central tree in Tippy Tippy Toe could be a figure creeping around at night, frozen in shock from encountering the viewer's gaze. This tree is related in part to the central trunk in Ole Reliable. They both feel raw, even aggressive, but in their own environments. In contrast to these individually rendered trees, Mirror Mirror appears to depict a circus of trees. They are all connected and working together to make sense of the pictorial space as if they were dancing to the same song. In these paintings, the motif of zooming in and zooming out occurs once again. The former two paintings focus on individual trees, while the latter demonstrates their relationship to one another. This relationship creates a way of figurative thinking that links Hughes' painterly practice to questions that go far beyond formal thinking, encompassing perception itself and decision-making in general.

Due to the different formats of the paintings, their urgency, and motifs, the viewer is ping-ponged back and forth. These invented landscapes create a cosmos through Hughes' energetic and abounding painterly practice, which nonetheless is embedded in centuries of art history. In Hughes' work, painting becomes a mode of wild utopian thinking, putting radical, paradoxical subjectivity at stake.

Sara Hughes was born in 1981 in Atlanta, GA, and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design and later attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Recent solo exhibitions include the Newport Art Museum, Newport, RI, 2018; Gallery Met at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY, 2018; and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta, GA, 2018, among others. In May 2018, Hughes completed Carving Out Fresh Options, a large-scale mural in Boston, MA, commissioned by the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy in partnership with the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum. Hughes has participated in numerous group exhibitions,

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at venues such as MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA. Hughes was also included in the 2017 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. Hughes' work belongs to many prominent museum collections including the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; the Jorge M. Perez Collection, Miami, FL; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta, GA; the M Woods Museum, Beijing, China; the Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ; the Rachofsky Collection, Dallas, TX; the Si Shang Art Museum, Beijing, China; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and the Whitney Museum of Art, New York, NY.

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