

GREENE NAFTALI

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Helen Marten

Eucalyptus, Let us in

January 15 – February 25
Ground Floor

You + Us

When archaeologists dig with hopes of unearthing nameable fragments, they seek to return latent abstractions to figuration. Bones, buildings, cups and spoons are entered into a new jig of re-articulation. Gathered and spat back out as collaged chronologies, the collected warmth of real-life perforations sieve these findings out of buried flatness and back into daily language. Once concealed by mud and foliage, sought-out areas become marked sites, places with contemporary traction.

The erased strokes of ancient activity are put back to work: vector grids symbolically allocate meaning or position to animals and humans alike. The enigma of labour necessitated by gravity – the haptic investments in making buildings stand upwards – is provided with a solid topological outline. Handwriting, numbers and vocabulary enter into new formal logic. The discovery might be intense or fragile and it is almost certainly ringed with a hallucinatory outline, which is at once a tracing of signs and alchemical process.

The drawing of a floor plan can also be read as the abstraction of an idea. Fantasy and philology allow mutation: sociological procedure, technological metaphor, erotic image, or surreal apparition bond as a muttering mass.

This might be something to do with making images that have an imposed itinerary quality, but are also disassembled to the point where they can be allowed to be non-committal if required. Flatness allows a literal description of movement, of A to B navigations, with the vector line being a suitably fast mechanism of delivery. But the point at which things become husked down to geometric memories of themselves is also the point when definition gets flabby: this tree is a drunken tree; that house has a pain in its side. Even the dismal colloquialisms of workplace melodrama can be exported, metaphors in essence: think of a spoon, jugs, stones, all invested with personality enough to converse with human crassness.

So of course it is a common idea that if we witness a foreign entity, we perceive it for the pure abstraction of its difference. A visible suspension of particles in the air – the smoggy, wispy blotch of smoke or burning – provides alien stimulation. There is something exotic in the fear and energy possessed by substance so closely linked with an extinguishing of inhalation. The puff-of-smoke is smoke-as-object, a clearly defined spectacle of the miracle of the atomic. So what is the essential nature of smoke? Obfuscator? Comic enabler? Sympathist?

When we apologize, the depth of sincerity can be deliberately fuzzy. A drip – of paint, of piss, of ice – is treacherous, but *really sorry* too. It is pure tragicomedy. In painterly form, the “apology” is a grim reflection of the human body, a caricature: beaded broken lines, little blobs and libidinous squiggles retain an elastic firmness. They are materially treacherous, with the paint itself playing plasticity made fixed substance; it is immutable and precisely without the warmth of flesh. But it is an extension of intension and we can apologize preemptively on its behalf. This is validation: Apologies! There is calculation and further archaeological gathering. Colour participates as though queered or gendered; the simple action of doubling forces tautological shortcut and collapse of definition; dysfunctional eyes are clouded by an auditory film and ears by a diagrammatic mapping of sensory importance. The mouth, the hand, the tongue are all involved. Our vast gray milkshake of information flexes and bends at will, a planktonic swarm of signs where merchandise, language, and spirituality all participate proudly in the stew of reality.

There are 8 new works in the exhibition.

Eucalyptus is one of three similar genera; many species, but far from all, are known as gum trees because they exude copious “gum” (bloodwood/red gum/kino) from any break in the bark. The generic name is derived from the Greek words “well” and “to cover”, referring to the cap on the stem which usually conceals the flower before it blooms.

–Helen Marten

Helen Marten lives and works in London. Recent solo exhibitions include Fridericianum, Kassel; Sadie Coles HQ, London; Johann König, Berlin; CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; and Chisenhale Gallery, London. She was included in the 55th and 56th Venice Biennales and the 12th Lyon Biennial. She has a forthcoming exhibition at the The Serpentine Galleries, London, and will be included in the upcoming Biennale of Sydney.

Please visit www.greenenaftaligallery.com for more information.

