

CHAPTER NY

For immediate release

Olivia van Kuiken
Make me mulch!
February 24 – March 25, 2023
Side Room

Chapter NY is thrilled to announce, *Make me Mulch!*, Olivia van Kuiken's first solo exhibition with the gallery, featuring a new series of paintings.

Olivia van Kuiken merges abstract and representational subjects to upend traditional notions of legibility. She considers the meaning of accuracy as it pertains to visual representation: what is needed to create an identifiable image and what are its associations? She avoids narrative conventions and instead, begins each piece with a formally derived structure or logic guided by a preexisting work. The artist creates a series of sketches, engaging an intuitive and frenetic drawing practice that informs her paintings on canvas. Enlarging small scribbling forms into sinuous, stretching shapes, she parodies the gesture itself and questions mythic status of the artist's hand.

The title of van Kuiken's exhibition, *Make me Mulch!*, follows New York's recent legalization of the composting of human bodies after death – a process that aptly mimics the breaking down of the artist's female subjects within her abstract compositions. Stripped of the personhood that portraiture strives to capture, van Kuiken's figures serve as symbols of ideas rather than real people.

Often inspired by surrealist literary sources, van Kuiken embraces the irrational and absurd. Her diptych installed across two walls in the exhibition space, stems from Unica Zürn 1968 novella about childbirth, *Trumpets of Jericho*, in which a burdensome uncle births a daughter through his ear. Van Kuiken's painting pictures two heads sharing a single ear pieced together by a constellation of "pixels". Imprecisely hand painted, her geometric pixel-like shapes defy the reproducibility enabled by mechanical processes while also referencing technology's integration into the language of painting. Her fractured image diminishes the possibility of assigning the role of muse or subject, instead urging their presence as abstract paintings despite any recognizable forms.

The central painting in the exhibition, *Zig Zag Girl (Hodler, Woman on her Deathbed)*, is based on Ferdinand Hodler's 1876 painting of a woman on her deathbed¹. Van Kuiken removes the subject from her intended context, fragmenting her body across three panels and enmeshing her contours within an abstracted landscape. The title of van Kuiken's painting also references a famous magical illusion in which a magician appears to saw a woman's body into three parts. In her painting, the artist wittily reenacts this butchering of the female subject. She pits these two examples of female subjectivity against each other to playfully obliterate the well-ingrained constructs that ascribe their meaning.

Olivia van Kuiken (b. 1997, Chicago, IL) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She received a BFA from Cooper Union, New York, NY in 2019. She recently had her first solo exhibition, *She clock, Me clock, We clock* at King's Leap, New York, NY. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Chateau Shatto, Los Angeles, LA; Chapter NY, New York, NY; and Shoot the Lobster Gallery, New York, NY.

¹ Ferdinand Hodler, *Bildnis einer Toten*, 1876, Oil on canvas. Collection of Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen.