

Golsa

CHARGED BODIES
Melinda Braathen,
Karl Monies

20/04/2023 - 27/05/2023

“Charged Bodies” is a duo exhibition featuring the paintings of the Norwegian-American artist Melinda Braathen and the ceramic vessels of Danish artist Karl Monies. The title incorporates a reference to both artists’ practices: the electrifying quality of Braathen’s paintings which pulsate with energy, representing abstracted visions of nature, people, and other forms, and on the other hand: the arcane vessels of Karl Monies, embodying the potency of preserving, of housing precious matter within, or keeping it from coming out.

The landscape paintings of Melinda Braathen toe the line of abstraction and figuration, emerging from the artist’s quest to reflect on her experiences and observations of the external and internal world. This new body of work incorporates several larger-scale and smaller-format paintings rendered in the artist’s recognizable mode of expression. Often starting with a specific reference from the real world, the works pass through several stages of interpretation that filter through different worlds of perception of reality: the sensory, the emotional, and the intellectual; this process invariably results in the abstraction of the original motif. Through layering perspectives, Braathen weaves different interpretations of the world into her works, imbuing them with varying meanings.

The choices Braathen makes regarding her technique significantly impact our perception — small brush strokes suggest impermanence and a swift, syrupy quality of ever-changing states represented through them. These features melt and meld, contrasted by opaquely painted surfaces that add stability, duetting more closely with representation. Thus, the planes of vibrant, bold color and brushstrokes spill across the canvas, partly framed by a few stable structures that cannot hold this energy in place. Many of Braathen’s works feature water currents and powerful streams. The artist gives water, a symbol of life and nature’s energy, notably human-like qualities of character and autonomy. It’s as if, for Braathen, the human form and psyche are embodied through water masses.

The use of color likewise denotes that Braathen’s landscapes may well be renditions of the mind more so than those of the eye. It is the emotional aspects of perception that are at play here. Thus the woods in *Soundscaper* (2023) become ominous through the subtle tonal shift from purple to red. Suggesting an unknown danger just outside the line of vision, an unknown threat, the artist doubles down on this feeling through the introduction of the fallen tree motif. The tree dominates the composition, breaking it up diagonally. And yet it is in the choice of color that Braathen delivers the most decisive impact, transforming the otherwise calm woodland setting depicting the life cycle into an emotionally compelling scene depicting a growing uncertainty.

We find the need to represent different planes of existence and states of mind through color in the artist’s other works. In *Light Builds* (2023), for example, through the tonal omnipresence of red, the artist manifests the state our body may be in after a long walk across a dry landscape on a sunny day – pulsating with heat, warm and vascular. This vision explores our body’s sensory input, which the artist does not present as contrary to the senses we tend to perceive as more objective, such as sight. Quite the contrary, Braathen allows different states of perception to intermingle. These different states increase each other’s vigor through pure connection and enable access to a heightened sense of being.

Some of Braathen’s paintings suggest other life processes, as in the case of *Body of Water* (2022), a painting that almost seems to be breathing. This abstract depiction of a spring, a course of water, and underwater plant and animal life is, in fact, an abundance of organic matter. The intensity of tonality and contrast between deep reds and bright yellows give inklings of biological structures and vital functions, even internal organs or cellular processes - drawing from the notion

that, further than biophilia, the natural world, which humans are a part of, is deeply interconnected. In this manner, the artist draws parallels between internal and external biological processes and structures.

Amongst the aura of unbounded energy in Melinda Braathen's paintings, the ceramic works of Karl Monies can be found. Each a unique piece, varying in color, shape, and size, these glazed stoneware pieces carry the potency of vessels for containment. Monies arranges ceramic jugs, jars, stoppered vases, and pots before us, making them functional – intentionally narrowing the gap between artistic expression and practical design thinking. Still, the materiality and form of Monies' works trigger a string of associations that are inadvertently tied to history, art history, and cultural and social practices of different peoples all around the planet. The artist clues us into this way of thinking by referencing various historical and artistic periods in his work, from ancient and prehistoric shapes to modernist and brutalist-type vessels.

Using clay as a conduit for a universal language of communication, Karl Monies activates its properties as a material we relate to on a primordial level. Clay is drawn from the earth, and so it is abundant. Its abundance makes it inclusive – of different cultures, people, lifestyles, and times. Throughout history, people have used ceramic works as containers for food, oil, and wine in various ceremonies and funerary rites. This universal appeal provides fertile ground for Monies to go on a free roam across different eras and allow himself to be inspired by ideas that harken back millennia and those that spring up in the present moment, decidedly contemporary.

A standout feature of Monies' vessels is reflected in the array of multi-colored climbing ropes the artist wraps around their handles and other parts as if to adorn (or bind), placing them within a contemporary context. The ropes denote the present-day quality of the works, in contrast with the traditional aspects of ceramic as a material and its primordial use. Another denotative aspect of the colorful ropes can be found in the promise of protection. It is no coincidence that the artist selects climbing ropes in particular – an unpretentious material that, in fact, plays an essential role in preserving life and facilitates a safe journey for climbers. Ropes are practical and robust; they do not imitate anything or claim to be more than what they are. What you see is what you get. And so there is within their employment, as in the case of clay, a clue about the artist's need to practice modesty and unassuming charm.

Though shapes and sizes differ, some aspects of Monies' works remain constant. One is the climbing rope, and the other is the oversized cork cap closing the openings at the top. The thought of what might be stored inside Monies' hand-crafted vessels may be as captivating as their surface. The cork tops sealing each vessel suggest that something may be contained within already – denoting both the works' functionality and its cryptic quality. The more obscure aspects of the works concern their capacity to not only hold their cargo but also to protect what is on the outside from the contents of their form. The fact that the containers are sealed asserts a note of warning - either what is within is precious, or it ought to remain there for its own and the good of others. In this manner, the vessels function as the proverbial Pandora's box (or rather, Pandora's jar, which is the correct translation of the Greek word pithos), raising questions about desire, ownership, and the consequences of our actions. Conversely, they can be seen as capsules within which precious energy is stored, representing small worlds, hosting their very own circulatory system, a power that remains in constant flux, reconfigured repeatedly.



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