

Meliksetian MB Briggs

Alex Heilbron

Apophenic

September 9 - October 28, 2023

Opening Reception:

Saturday, September 9th 6-8pm



Meliksetian | Briggs is pleased to present *Apophenic*, a presentation of new paintings by **Alex Heilbron**, the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery and her first in Texas.

The exhibition takes its title from apophenia, an early symptom of schizophrenia in which a person begins to draw connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena. Troubled by a disorder of the altogether essential process of meaning making, the apophenic no longer discriminates between the contingent and the intentional. Put another way, she comes to see a "pattern" in the undeniable recurrence or logic within the "wallpaper" or "background" of everyday life. Applied to Heilbron's work, the symptom suggests an aesthetic preoccupation with pattern, a genre intended to resolve into the background, but instead is the protagonist in her work.

The exhibition is a continuation of Heilbron's deployment of pattern on the surface of the canvas as a register of cultural ideals of femininity, marking a development in her work informed by a technical shift from an entirely manual process of masking to a mixed process incorporating computer-controlled elements. Variations come to our attention, as in Heilbron's manually articulated paintings, through compositional regularity: five paintings repeat the same scale/ratio used in her last show, while the remaining fall within two distinct formats; all the works in *Apophenic* repeat a simple four-pointed flower grid at varying scales. A subtle inclusion of manual gesture remains inherent, though here the warm qualities of manual craftsmanship give way to the cold registration of digital transaction—the swipe and place,

the copy and stretch. This formal shift is paralleled by an aggressive tension in the work calling up the psychic fringes of American subjectivity.

The muddling of meaning that comes with the territory of the decorative is hyperbolized by the application of new strategies in the work—from the inclusion of erroneous spellings and portmanteau words to disfigurations of motif. Drawing inspiration from her visit at the John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza and The George W. Bush Presidential Library in Dallas, Texas, Heilbron incorporates associations from ruptures in American history. Her new patterned paintings are contaminated by the fall-out of an event, as in *Depository* and *Expectations and results*, which diagram the Chanel suit worn by Jackie Onassis in the motorcade. Blood is suggestively encoded in twee red icons clustered areas of intensity, proliferating symbols, references, and gestures. The stimulus is more granular in the five paintings titled *Flag (I-V)*, flag-based patterns tattered by glitch in which the graphic representation of a doll-like female visage serves as an anchoring interruption amidst the vibrating effect of rectangular marks and parallel lines in the thick of the work's overall floral motif.

As an index of history, Heilbron's paintings continue to evoke a nebulous territory through freely modifying stylistic motifs from past eras in palettes and graphic styles conceived in present time. Take for instance the four-pointed flower featured in each painting in the show: its origin is alternately Medieval and Mid-Century, or even reminiscent of digital graphic design from the 1990s or early 2000s. Evading the depths of the past, Heilbron's paintings evoke an ahistorical plane of simultaneity. As in the psychoanalytic description of schizophrenia, a foreground-background confusion produces a subject without an unconscious—pure surface is a genre of madness.

Text by Nilo Goldfarb

Alex Heilbron (b.1987, San Rafael, CA) received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2009 from the San Francisco Art Institute, studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 2014-2017 and earned her Master of Fine Arts at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2020. Heilbron has exhibited both nationally and internationally. In 2022, her work was included in the major survey exhibition *Women Painting Women* curated by Andrea Karnes at *The Modern*, Fort Worth, TX (catalog). Other recent solo exhibitions include *High Shame* at *Hiestand Galleries*, Miami University, Oxford, OH and *Scent Description for a Young Woman* at *Ashley*, Berlin.

Group shows over the past few years include exhibitions at *LAXART*, Los Angeles. *Moscow Museum of Modern Art*, Moscow, *Cosmo Sports*, Düsseldorf, *Good Forever*, Düsseldorf, and *Contemporary Fine Art*, Berlin. She has received numerous awards including the *William and Dorothy Yeck Purchase Award*, the *Helen Frankenthaler Scholarship* in 2019 - 2020 and a *Pollock-Krasner Grant* for 2023-2024. Heilbron lives and works in Los Angeles.