

RÉNEE LEVI: MAUDE

Sep 1 - Oct 14, 2023

Maude, Renée Levi's second exhibition at the gallery, marks the first time the artist shows works she considers "precarious". Emancipating from her signature scribbles and color-block compositions on more than large-scale canvases, Renée Levi produced a series of new works of small and large formats that seem to reflect the artist's search for an essential equilibrium through a visible economy of means. Yet, the notion of balance in the context of this new body of work remains unstable and open to interpretation. For someone like Renée Levi, who dedicated a lifetime to art-making, balance results from a constellation of forms, colors and textures that can only be grasped beyond language and intellect.

Visually, the painting's technique, composition and colors manifest the artist's will to allow the viewer to perceive the sensual materiality that makes each work. Transparent priming reveals the weave of the linen, while the raw marks of the brushes or paint rollers show the amount of pigment the artist used to translate a gesture. Levi's abstract work is process-oriented, letting the inherent quality of the tools she uses (a one-meter-wide roll, a pen, a cheap marker, etc.) help define the final work. At the studio, Levi lays her canvases on the wooden floor, occasionally allowing their surfaces to retain its imprint. Though unplanned, the resulting marks provide a structure to the painting that the artist always welcomes into the process. Process, or the absence thereof, is also characteristic of the artist's ongoing research about painting, both as a medium and material. By leaving an important surface of some of the works unpainted, Renée Levi speculates about the conditions under which a work is deemed complete.

Maude also marks the first time the artist agreed to show works that are significantly smaller in scale. Until now, it had been impossible for her to produce gestures, whose scope she could only translate on large surfaces, onto smaller ones. For Levi, large scale was never only about power, but rather what was needed to capture a body movement in her paintings faithfully. The new series of works featured in *Maude* perform a balancing act between the gestural power of her signature bombastic works and the intimacy small-scale works can offer to the artist herself, and ultimately, the viewer. This concern for the viewer's experience, as well as the expression of raw emotions—such as pain and anger—onto the canvas, is what inscribes Renée Levi within a line of women painters who have been reclaiming abstract painting and transforming it on their own terms.

Honoring figures—prominent or otherwise—overlooked by history, Renée Levi almost always titles her projects after women's first names. According to the artist, *Maude* is an unknown hero, whose name conjures up a strong and courageous person. The exhibition's eponymous title pays homage to the many anonymous *Maudes* that have been forgotten, while the artist's tribute materializes with as many unapologetic and visceral marks, dashes, and splashes. Stripped of a last name, a first name may sound precarious. Yet, in *Maude*, precarity is anything but weakness. It is about leaving the works open to all potentials, while allowing vulnerability to emerge as the ultimate tool to probe existential questions.
— Elise Lammer (curator and author based in Lausanne)

Renée Levi was born 1960, in Istanbul and grew up in Aargau. Today, she lives and works in Basel. After studying architecture at the HTL MuttENZ/Basel, she studied at the Zurich School of Art and Design. In 1998, she started working together with Marcel Schmid as a studio partner. Recent solo exhibitions include at Öktem Aykut (Istanbul, 2022); PHILIPPZOLLINGER (2021); Villa du Parc (Annemasse, 2021); Musée d'Art, Histoire et Archéologie d'Évreux (2020); Biennale de Lyon (2019); Museum Langmatt (Baden, 2019); Istituto Svizzero Milan (2019) and at Galerie Freymond-Guth (Basel, 2017). In addition, the artist has been included in numerous group exhibitions, such as at Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2023); Centre d'art Pasquart (Biel, 2022); MAMCO (Geneva, 2021); Istituto Svizzero Rome (2019) or at Kunstverein Munich (2015). Renée Levi has received several awards, including the Prix de la Société des Arts de Genève, Arts Visuel, in 2019, or the Prix Meret Oppenheim in 2002. Moreover, Levi is the winner of the public art competition of the Parliament Building in Bern, Switzerland.