



Ben Gomes

Outside

December 2nd 2023 - January 6th 2024

Politicians, like other confidence men, poets, neurotics, and witches, warp reality. They are sculptors of the universe and its ontology. The Rumsfeld Matrix, as accredited to Donald Rumsfeld and imagined deep in the early noughties myth creation of WMDs, claimed that there are “unknown unknowns.”

The six works in *Outside*, Ben Gomes’ solo exhibition at 243 Luz, bend and drag image clusters across the rough of unstretched canvases. Later, once the canvas is drawn tight to the stretcher bars, the composition snaps elsewhere again - the multifractal images pulling apart, cleaving like a suture snagging on something, or like a muscle bowing on impact.

Gomes’ thinking around the *outside* addresses a phenomenological turn, wherein the impossibility of grasping that which is just outside the frame of consciousness is an energy worth rubbing against, an attempt to draw in from the ambient force of a shadow consciousness.

Like Wilfred Bion’s psychoanalytic theory of ‘O’, which Bion identifies as the ultimately unknown and unknowable realm of experience, Gomes is riffing on a kind of precognitive drive; yet whereas ‘O’ emphasises the dread of our inescapable encounter with the unknowable, Gomes’ approach is tied to the speculative potentiality of and surrender to the unknown.

The sustained reworkings and mutations of the work, even once installed in an exhibition space, channel a surrealist tendency to allow an automatic third party into the composition, with Gomes aiming to land on an image that manages to condense a slew of emotions into a simple focused arrangement. He has likened his process to a carpet maker resisting the pattern they are weaving. This resistance is partly inspired by the work of Catherine Malabou who writes about neuroplasticity and transformation through accident, a moment where identity is inexorably altered in a way that could not have been foreseen. There is a sense in her writing that we don’t know what’s inside us, and can’t always control what gets inside.

Gomes is making figurative work, but poses the question of why *inside* the figure is not a genre. He references this through various transparent materials, there is a resemblance to anatomical and body imaging, Merano glass vessels, skeletal structures and internal machinery.

As a result, the works seem to gurgle and drift. The weight of the objects he paints, their collisions within the vacuum of the pictorial space, seem to imagine an unseen space, both bodily and discursive, where sensations are opened up. These sensations can't be contained, and so rupture the canvas, calcifying in the air outside the weave, and taking on a sculptural form in steel and aluminium. Some kind of unknown-unknown has osmosed from the outside in causing a storm surge from the inside out.

List of works clockwise from left:

Hark Abstract, oil on canvas, 138 x 105 cm

Buried Spring, oil on canvas, aluminium frame, 103 x 74 cm

Senility, oil on canvas, steel frame, 94 x 82 cm

Dancing Horse, an Apostle travels, oil on canvas, steel frame, 121 x 100 cm

Spine Abstract (Growth), oil on canvas, 62 x 51 cm

In the Office

Blood Hallucination, oil on canvas, 49 x 37 cm

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