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Rachel Sharpe

Gravity and Grace

1 March - 4 May, 2024

de boer (Antwerp)
Mechelsesteenweg 247, Antwerpen, Belgium

Opening Reception: Friday, 1 March (19:00-22:00)

de boer (Antwerp) is pleased to present *Gravity and Grace*, a solo exhibition by Los Angeles based painter **Rachel Sharpe**. The exhibition unfolds captivating narrative through cropped-in and meticulously detailed oil paintings on linen. Sharpe's canvases serve as narrative vignettes, portraying romantically charged depictions of everyday objects and uncanny spiritual moments.

A defining characteristic of Sharpe's paintings is the use of 'Dramatic Illumination' or tenebrism; meaning a violent contrast between light and shadow in an intentional way, where darkness becomes a dominating feature of the image. The style emerged in the 16th and 17th Century championed by painters such as Carravaggio, and as a response to artistic rules that some considered too rigid, and limited the strength of the narrative.

Sharpe's newest paintings illuminate human sensations and pull at the threads of what is considered ordinary. Power dynamics within the exhibition's works are shifting and varied. In 'Bee' a hand adorned with a red ribbon extends, tenderly cradling a small lifeless bee in its palm. Symbolically, the giant hand dwarfs the creature. The significance marked by the red ribbon transcends mere size, as bees at large are consequential, with a third of the world's food production depending on them. In this portrayal, the power dynamic between the fragility of the bee and its vital role in sustaining life challenges initial perceptions, presenting a nuanced reflection on the interplay of power and significance within the ordinary.

In 'Phone' a woman's foot is depicted stepping on a coiled phone cord. The subtle nuance of her nervous tick is frozen, and the resulting punctum thus exposes the vulnerability of the instant eliciting the feeling of a lack of control. Punctum coming from Roland Barthes' seminal writing on photography is a useful reference in Sharpe's paintings. Specifically to Sharpe's still-life paintings which functionally freeze moments that range from the innocuous and mundane, to uncanny and surreal. Punctum here refers to constituting a private meaning unrelated to any cultural code. Sharpe's paintings allow for interpretation, depend on ambiguity, and by ceasing to be overtly symbolic consent to self interpretation.

The title of the exhibition, *Gravity and Grace*, is a reference to French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil's first published work of the same title. Sharpe, like Weil, is interested in how grace operates in the world despite force and contingency. As Simone Weil wrote 'The reality of the world is the result of our attachment. It is the reality of the self which we transfer into things. It has nothing to do with independent reality. That is only perceptible through total detachment. Should only one thread remain, there is still attachment'.

ABOUT RACHEL SHARPE

Rachel Sharpe (b. 1990) is an American painter born in Seattle, Washington and now lives and works in Los Angeles. Sharpe danced ballet professionally starting at the age of eleven and attended The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. A self-taught painter, Sharpe's oil paintings make use of dramatic chiaroscuro lighting and cropped in compositions resulting in an emphasis on corporeal and tactile textural elements. Sharpe has exhibited her work internationally, with her first solo exhibition taking place at de boer, Los Angeles, and subsequent exhibitions taking place in Hong Kong, Los Angeles, and New York.