

# Leidy Churchman

## *Inner Dialogue*

September 7 — October 5, 2024



Leidy Churchman, *Inner Dialogue*, exhibition view, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2024).  
Photo: Martin Argyroglo.

In *Inner Dialogue*, Leidy Churchman's first show at Galerie Chantal Crousel, images from previous exhibitions come back around amid new narratives, vantages, and technologies. Taken together, the paintings index the everyday in order to transcend it, making the real spiritual, the material magical, and showing us what it's like to see, feel, and live in this particular moment. Here, the potent energy of an idea becomes an animal, a sign becomes a refuge, a feeling state a shade of blue, a credit card a meditation on death and transformation; everyday sights and sensations are first themselves and then so much more than themselves. With deft and evocative brushwork, Churchman works with figuration as a means to abstract—to help us to see beyond what we see—translating Buddhist concepts, symbols, and stories into familiar and unfamiliar compositions. In this way, paint becomes a spiritual medium, a mechanism to mediate spirit, flow, birth, death, and life continuously into and out of the frame.

A feature of Churchman's subject matter is a pervasive sense of the infinite: the boundless range of images they choose to paint; the ways in which pictorial objects return again and again; and the use of repetition in the paintings themselves. With this exhibition, Churchman has taken that qualitative expansiveness and pushed it a step further, creating a machine that makes two of the paintings in the show move continuously. This steady movement is propelled by a simple mechanism that allows each painting to loop around two pins behind a cutout in the wall. Even if our eyes seek a place to rest, the story continues to unwind and recede only to come around again.

"The movement turns the painting into a stream. I wanted to have it act like a model train. Seeing it emerge from a tunnel and then disappear again imparts a thrill. The mind can pretend to forget and have a fresh experience," says Churchman.

*Inner Paradise*, the larger of the moving paintings, illuminates a scene of giraffes large and small as they frolic and bask amid a light-infused landscape. As the painting unspools, a wish-fulfilling jewel—the Buddhist symbol of the infinitely rich qualities of mind—emerges then disappears as giraffes once again exist and expire in our field of vision. The effect is of a visual mantra which upon viewing has the power to disrupt our conventional thought process. *Inner Paradise* is an intimate view into Churchman's own meditation practice and desire for awakening. The use of these archetypal images and symbols also seems to point to the idea of human stories writ large, how the story of life gets made and remade, and how though we have no control over the chaos of the universe, we can at least try to see it in all its strange color and mystery.

In *Giraffe Tigle Birth* a female giraffe stands and gives birth, the sky behind her split between the night and the day, her face pledged to serenity and endurance no matter the surrounds. At her feet and head are *tigles*, the essential droplets of energy that, according to Tibetan Buddhism, represent the purest expression of who we are. The tenderly painted giraffe against a mountainous background is much more than a mere pastoral scene; it's brimming with narrative excess, birth and calm, night and day, the beginning and the end.

A group of smaller works alternates between the mundane and the atmospheric, working to suffuse everyday sights with feeling, spirit, and otherworldliness. Churchman shows their interest again in seeing beyond what we see, while embracing that the way we see is the receipt of all our debts and gifts. The proliferation of images points to the philosophical: a hyperdimensional rendering of a James Turrell work plays with perception, a tight crop on a row of upright lemons renders them strange and wondrous. The MasterCard symbol, an image Churchman has worked with before, can't be removed from the systems it ennobles—capital, debt, greed—but here seems on its way to another existence, the dark blue moody and foreboding while the overlay of dots promises a journey of interstellar transformation.

Other works suggest galactic worlds, tiny landscapes, a glance up to the sky or across the middle distance. In *Primordial Ooze*, the sharp fangs and mouth of a traditional Buddhist protector deity clamp down on the figure of a person. This is the ego transformed. These guardians are understood to devour the mundane world, a comfort and a threat as we take in Churchman's universe of images.

One larger work titled *Pith Instruction* features a close-up of a shrine, a stage set of compacted objects: conch shells, crystals, water vessels. A rupa of the bodhisattva Manjushri, sword in hand, is poised to cut delusion and ignorance. The dots again suggest another perspective encroaching, the liminal journey from one way of seeing to another.

The other moving painting in the exhibition, *Internal Loop*, is a roll through modern existence, a word painting that evokes screens and scrolling, with words such as “murder,” “juice,” “dependency,” and “piss” presented on the same plane. We are reminded of our social media scrolls, a place where genocide, animal videos, a birthday party are all part of the moving picture, which has the effect of equalizing them. The constant stream of word-images also look like ads, signs, or book covers, media objects with the sole purpose of consumption and preoccupation. In *Internal Loop* as in *Inner Dialogue*, the larger word painting in the show, words are cues to look further, they “take you by the hand to a concept so you can go beyond it,” says Churchman. “We take for granted that we open our eyes and are looking at the world. We think the world is coming in, but actually we are. We're projecting out everything we've ever experienced, onto everything that we're seeing. We're kind of barely seeing what's there.” *Inner Dialogue* can be understood, then, as an offering to look differently: at the world, each other, and most importantly, into ourselves.

—Svetlana Kitto

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Leidy Churchman's paintings delve into an expansive range of themes, from our connection to nature, the urban landscape, political structures, as well as the flow of visual information in society—while always returning to an exploration of the daily complex emotions we face as we navigate this world.

Churchman works from a deep influence of Tibetan Buddhism. Each subject is treated equally without hierarchy. Precise representation gives way to looseness. Churchman is free and unbound in their painting, allowing for a sly humor in even the most tender work. In whatever painting style or subject matter Churchman is exploring, a sense of delight in possibility is always present. Within each painting, they gather the semblance of an anecdote which invites the viewer's own narrative, creating a world of doors; individual portals for entry. Their paintings document their aspiration to create connections and interactions that bring us closer to our own direct understanding of the discernable.

Leidy Churchman's works have been the subject of solo exhibitions such as the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (2021); Hessel Museum of Art and CCS Bard College, New York (2019); Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln (2017); Boston University Art Gallery, Boston (2013).

Their works have also been included in group exhibitions held by institutions including : White Columns, New York (2023); National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2022); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2022; 2016); The Perimeter, London (2022); Kunsthalle Bern (2021; 2015); Villa Carmignac, Porquerolles (2021); Fondazione Prada, Venice (2021); Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (2021; 2015); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2018); Kunstmuseum Bern (2017); New Museum, New York (2017); LAXART, Los Angeles (2016); Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2015); LACE, Los Angeles (2015; 2007); The National Gallery of Denmark (2014); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2013); TAG, The Hague (2012); MoMA PS1, New York (2010).

Leidy Churchman's works have joined the collections of the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.