

GALERIE FONSWELTERS

Nothing is Permanent

Olga Balema, Louise Lawler, Anh Trần

18 January – 8 March 2025

The exhibition *Nothing is Permanent* brings together three artists who question conventions of display, materiality and value of art, challenging both the structures of art institutions and broader cultural, economic, and social systems.

The title of the exhibition is derived from a work of the same name by Olga Balema. Through her unorthodox approach to sculpture, Balema questions the norms and values of the art market and exhibition spaces. Her sculptures often occupy gallery spaces in ways that subvert conventional display methods, such as placing pieces on the floor or embedding them onto walls, which destabilizes the traditional viewer-object relationship and defies typical preservation standards. By emphasizing the precarious and sometimes grotesque qualities of her materials, she implicitly critiques the art world's tendency to fetishize permanence, value, and beauty.

Anh Trần's work explores abstraction as a means of seeking freedom. In her paintings, Trần intuitively and expressively records different speeds and textures of movement and thought. The artist frequently examines themes of displacement, diaspora, and the layering of personal and collective histories. While Trần's work does not engage with Institutional Critique in the conventional sense of examining art institutions' internal operations, her exploration of cultural and personal identity can be seen as a critique of broader institutional structures that influence cultural narratives. Her work contributes to a larger conversation about representation, identity, and the limitations of institutional frameworks.

Since the late 1970s, Louise Lawler has focused on examining and revealing power dynamics, practices, and values within art institutions, the art market, and the broader systems that shape the production, display, and consumption of art. Her most iconic works are photographs of famous works of art as they appear outside of traditional museum contexts, often in storage, in collectors' homes, or at auction houses. By capturing art in these settings, Lawler reveals how the meaning and value of an artwork are not solely inherent but are influenced by its surroundings, presentation, and ownership. Lawler's practice also brings attention to the "invisible" elements of the art world, such as the roles of dealers, curators, and collectors, and the impact of these figures on how art is valued and perceived. Her use of framing and perspective – often focusing on details or fragments of iconic works of art – questions the authority of institutionalized perspectives, suggesting that our view of art is always mediated by institutional and market influences.