

Gaa

vent violet

WILDER ALISON

JANUARY 31 - MARCH 15, 2025

GAA NEW YORK

Gaa is pleased to present *vent violet*, a solo exhibition of new works by Wilder Alison. *vent violet* represents Alison's third solo exhibition with Gaa, and the first in the gallery's New York space.

The late poet Kevin Killian opens his collection *Tony Greene Era* with a piece called "The Birth of Pallaksch." In it the writer is listening to a lecture by the painter R.H. Quaytman, who says: "Op art, like humor, or sex, presses our yes and no buttons simultaneously." It may be inaccurate to claim the paintings in Wilder Alison's new solo show *vent violet* are "op art," yet they certainly and repeatedly mash the "yes! no!" button Quaytman describes. Not oil on canvas, nor watercolor on paper (though they have qualities of both), these paintings are wool—hand-dyed, cut, stitched, and stretched. They have no scale, nor depth, nor figure, so to say they are abstract would, on its face, be true. Yet even within their abstractions, the formal and material concerns develop a poetics, taking on a nearly rhetorical value. They suggest, propose, invite, and defy definition, playing out a series of negations and affirmations with and against the history of painting. One may even be tempted to call them "not not paintings."

This quality of "yes-no-ness" is the essence of the word "pallaksch," to which Killian's title refers; coined by the poet Friedrich Hölderlin (in a state of mental decline), it is said to be a "mad unword" that is "out of tune with the poem" yet, somehow at the same time, "the way into the poem." Unlike many abstract works, Alison's paintings do not remain untitled and instead bear complex and mysterious epigrams which blur formal lines. Neither are these not titles, nor are they not poems: they lie between the two. In fact, they bear a closer resemblance to single line poems (or monostichs), than to the conventional indexical attributes of titles. Indeed, many of the formulations and neologisms Alison contrives feel as if they might be just as at home in a poem by Paul Celan. Take, for instance, this line from *Tiibingen, Junner*, the Celan poem who's final line cites Hölderlin ('Pallaksch, pallaksch!'):

Their - 'a riddle, what is pure-/ly arisen' -, their / memory of floating.

Now look to one of Alison's monostichs:

water bears a valent/ne—a crab's: eff/gy

Or:

the weed that pulls the rug or the leg leaves f/rth /n wake

Like the paintings themselves, the title-poems invite the viewer to read further. This impulse is affirmed by the presence in the gallery of various books which have informed Alison's thinking in the making of these paintings—a thinking which suffuses the paintings themselves. Take this description of the films of Jean Renais from Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's *Arts of Impoverishment*: "Each work becomes a model of self-contained (nonreferential) identity. Yet this self-containment is also self-explosive. For the activity of this narcissistic concentration is extraordinarily agitated. The work is continually finding itself in other parts of itself— although what it finds is also always different from itself."

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It would be difficult to find a better description for the paintings in vent violet than this. Truly one of their most striking attributes is how, unlike most paintings (abstract or otherwise), rather than facing outward, they look inward. There is action there, and it is slow. A coming into solution; saturation, suffusion, interfusion. Absorption. Beneath the surface, within and between the fibers. And yet despite this stasis, the paintings remain energetic; they draw the eye in circuits, through reversals, across surface and suture, confounding orientation, yet inviting association, encounter, affiliation. If the cutting of the fabric might put a viewer in mind of Fontana's slashes, the stitching repairs and annuls this. If the wrapped edges appear to be an incidental twist on the unbounded action of Pollock's later work, the clean, gem-like lines confound this. In the end, because the vernacular of abstraction is now so well-trod, we may also glimpse Frankenthaler in the paintings' palettes; or Rothko's myopic haze in the bleed-haloes of the dye. But in each case we can also find their refusal or undoing. Paradoxically lapidary and comfy, earthy yet clean, they are both bodily—even blood-stained—and sacrosanct, like stained glass. Which is to say, in saying "yes! no!" these paintings cleave—in both senses of the word—together and in two.

- Gabrielle Kruis, January 2025.

Wilder Alison (b. 1986, Burlington, VT) is an interdisciplinary artist who creates paintings by dyeing and sewing together large pieces of wool. Driven by the limitations of language to accommodate and build analog forms for transness, queerness, and self-embodiment, Alison's works build, reassemble, and create vibrant visual constructions. Often presented individually, in diptychs, or triptychs, the work extends the notion of the medium of painting, and questions the idea of what a painting can or should consist of.

Alison has been included in recent institutional exhibitions at Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockland, ME; DAS MINSK Kunsthau, Potsdam, Germany; and CUE Art Foundation, New York, NY. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Gaa, Cologne, Provincetown, MA, and New York, NY; White Columns, New York, NY; Lateral Roma, Rome; KAJE, Brooklyn, NY; Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, NY; and FIERMAN, New York, NY. Alison has also exhibited work with Gordon Robichaux at Parker Gallery, Los Angeles, CA and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY among others. Alison was a fellow at Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany and the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, MA twice, and has also participated in residencies at the Womens Studio Workshop, Rosendale, NY; Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris, France; Joya Artist Residency, Velez Blanco, Spain; Clay Break, Fayetteville, AR; Triangle France-Astérides, Marseille, France; Lighthouse Works, Fisher's Island, NY; Fire Island Artist Residency, Fire Island, NY; and Lower East Side Printshop, New York, NY. Alison's work has been reviewed in Hyperallergic and The New Yorker. Alison graduated with a BA and an MFA in Painting from Bard College, and now lives and works between New York, Vermont, and France.