

blank is pleased to present *Aperture*, a solo exhibition by Annabelle Agbo Godeau, her first with the gallery. The word aperture – an opening – is inseparable from its use as technical jargon for the hole through which light passes through a camera lens in order to capture an image: its eye. Fixing on it as the title for her exhibition, then, Agbo Godeau exposes us to its double life of meaning, both as a descriptor for gaps or holes (in plot, in time, in meaning) and its allusion to the objectifying, surveilling gaze of the movie camera.

There's something of the uncanny that permeates the artist's collection of small oils on canvas. This making strange of the familiar is carried not just by what the paintings depict – vignettes chanced upon and excised from a cross-section of "mystery movie" films, from auteur cinema to mainstream horror flicks (micro-scenes that coax recognition just as they slip from its clumsy grasp) – or even their familiar devices (exaggerated contrast, close ups, reflection) designed to heighten our suspense. Rendered with more or less traditional technique, their waxy surfaces nevertheless evoke the texture and processes of analogue film to reflect the origins of their imagery; its coatings and emulsions and alchemies which (re)produce substitute realities in a vein with its art historical counterpart *trompe-l'œil*.

As with film, however, any attempt at illusionism is thwarted by materiality – the painted image is bound to the objecthood of the canvases and the layers of paint visible at their edges just as the moving image is bound to the reel and projector. Isolated from their original cinematic context and cropped or zoomed in, Agbo Godeau's paintings rather present as clues to a larger, open-ended narrative. Portable and modular, they can be re-arranged and sequenced at will to produce a potentially infinite set of storylines, the missing 'frames' of its gaps surmisable only by ideation on the viewer's part.

Made in two parts, the exhibition also includes a new series of paintings that take their compositional cues from the Chicago Film Society's collection of test images used by film labs for colour grading, known as "leader ladies" (also "China girls", "lady wedge", "china doll", "girl head", or "lili" in France). Here, Agbo Godeau introduces the geometry of the colour scales and film grids into juxtaposition with film scenes in composite images that narrate the narration – the story of the story – of their own becoming. By zooming into the dated phenomenon of the leader lady, Agbo Godeau brings us into contact with an otherwise obscure but heavily gendered snippet of movie-making history about which Genevieve Yu writes,

"From one perspective, the China Girl is an analytic tool equivalent to test patterns, color swatches, and other instruments used in quality control procedures. Its appearance is only incidental to its function, which was rendered minimal by the late 1970s. From another perspective, the China Girl is a suggestive image, and however depersonalized, it still carries a charge of personal significance, even of life. Though laboratory technicians will often cite the former as the rationale for using the China Girl, it is the latter that accounts for its persistence. Film too, is often conceived in terms of this contradiction: both a mass-produced object and an image imbued with and organically underpinned by a quality of life."

Genevieve Yue, *Girl Head: Feminism and Film Materiality* (2020)

-

Born in Paris in 1995, Agbo Godeau obtained her MFA from the Beaux-Arts in 2018. Between 2019 and 2021 she studied under Ellen Gallagher at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, where she currently lives and works. Recent exhibitions include *In anderen Händen: Highlights der Sammlung Philara in der Miettinen Collection*, Berlin (2025); *20 Jahre dHCS-Stipendium*, Kunstverein Düsseldorf (2024); *The 't' is Silent: 8th biennale of Painting*, Museum Dondt-Dhaenens, Deurle (2022) and *Species of space*, The Bass Museum, Miami (2022).