

Before the Mountain

Merve Ceylan, William Feaver, Lizzy Gabay, Paul Kain, Jörg Kratz, Christoph Matthes, Angus McCrum, Nina Molloy, Konstantin Resch, Miranda Fengyuan Zhang

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Before the Mountain begins with a question: can new genres, movements, or shared aesthetic formations still take shape within today's highly dispersed artistic landscape?

Historically, artistic movements often emerged through proximity. Groups of artists worked alongside one another, sharing not only ideas but also a common sensibility shaped through sustained contact and collective experience. In contrast, the contemporary condition is increasingly defined by heightened individualism, global circulation, and what has been described as “the disappearance of the nearby,” with artists no longer gathering around a shared place or context, but instead encountering one another through instantaneous flows of information from across the world.

Within this condition, form may still arise with certain degrees of relationality, yet it is unclear that such configurations can ever solidify into entities comparable to the modernist “movements”. In the wake of postmodernism, the very idea of a stable, coherent “ism” may no longer carry any real organizing force. Terms such as “post-internet” or identity-based movements may describe tendencies or currents, but they seldom assume the structural or social unity that once characterized these affinities.

Rather than attempting to resolve this query, *Before the Mountain* takes it as the point of its departure. The exhibition does not propose a new genre, nor does it attempt to retroactively define one. Instead, it asks what it means to curate under conditions in which shared context can no longer be assumed, and in which proximity itself no longer guarantees collective form. The artists in the exhibition were chosen within the practical context of YveYANG — each representing a rigorous, mature practice capable of meaningfully entering a shared space. Their coming together does not claim cohesion; rather, it stages

a situation in which difference, independence, and partial connection coexist.

In this sense, *Before the Mountain* is not an exhibition about the absence of form, but about the uncertainty of formation. Here, *Before the Mountain* names a condition of suspension: before form stabilizes, before a movement is named, and before proximity reveals shared direction.

Practices in Suspension:

Miranda Fengyuan Zhang's practice unfolds within a broader moment in which textile-based practices have moved from the margins of “craft” into the center of contemporary discourse and display. Her work juxtaposes a ripple with a small architectural form—one a fleeting moment, the other a lasting structure—finding a balance between restraint, material sensitivity, and poetic clarity. Christoph Matthes's materially layered paintings, in turn, weave together doubled motifs, candy-toned palettes, and collage-like fragments of childhood memory, producing images that feel playful yet subtly unsettling, where nostalgia and vulnerability coexist.

Vienna-based artist Merve Ceylan creates softly blurred, grainy compositions whose atmospheric surfaces culminate in a distinctly painterly finish. In contrast, Jörg Kratz's hazy paintings are strikingly smooth, evoking mysterious twilight landscapes in which distant bushes and branches dissolve into flickering, near-monochrome abstraction.

Material intensity also unfolds across generations. At age 83, renowned critic and curator William Feaver presents vigorously brushed landscapes of northeastern England in some of his earliest group exhibitions as a painter, distilling the essence of geological transformation rather than rendering the terrain naturalistically. Similarly, German artist Angus

McCrum pushes painterly texture further toward abstraction, where landscape and still life dissolve into expressive color fields that reflect inner states rather than external reality.

Narrative figuration unfolds in yet another direction. Trinidad-based artist **Paul Kain** centers on vivid depictions of daily life and close-knit community relationships. By contrast, **Nina Molloy**, born in Bangkok and based in New York, crafts hyper-realistic oil on copper paintings that transform Thai spirit houses, tropical flora, and ancestral figures into hauntingly vivid historical visions.

Konstantin Resch's works brim with absurd, nonsensical humor, rendered on roughly textured jute canvas that reinforces his singular voice. Though figurative, **Lizzy Gabay's** paintings are driven less by narrative than by atmosphere, foregrounding subtle psychological undercurrents — an ambient tension that quietly unsettles the surface.