

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULIE MEHRETU

With an installation by Robin Coste Lewis

2 April – 14 May 2022

Opening Reception: Saturday 2 April, 6 - 8 pm

*As a painter, I am trying to negotiate all that is happening in the world through my work.*¹ —Julie Mehretu

Marian Goodman Gallery Paris is delighted to announce an exhibition of works by Julie Mehretu. Following her acclaimed retrospective recently presented in four major U.S. museums, the show—the third by Mehretu at the Paris gallery—features a new series of medium-sized paintings and two large-scale prints. This exhibition also marks the debut of an ongoing collaboration between Mehretu and poet Robin Coste Lewis. Here, art and poetry intersect, as an audio recording of a new poem composed by Lewis for Mehretu is transmitted in the gallery space; a subtle conversation ensues, culminating in an installation created by Lewis from her family's private photographic archive.

For more than two decades, Julie Mehretu has been reinventing abstraction with a poetic and unique visual language layered with a variety of marks, gestures and meanings. Her impressive body of work, including paintings, drawings and prints, is inspired by a multitude of sources that have evolved over time; architectural elevations, ancient history, literary and musical references, and, in the last few years, addressing international subjects of concern such as migration, revolution, social justice, climate change and the impact and repercussions of the global pandemic experienced by all nations over the past two years.

Mehretu's examinations of contemporaneous events are reinforced in her recent paintings, as photographs from accredited news sources of world events serve as both the point of departure on which compositions unfold as well as the foundation for formal experimentation. The selected imagery is first digitally modified and blurred, before being translated via airbrush onto canvas; the result is imperceptible yet conveys a subliminal feeling. Mehretu then combines various layers of ink and acrylic with the use of paint brush, airbrush, and screen print, creating intricate spaces of possibility. The nine paintings on view at the gallery are part of a suite of works entitled *Among the Multitude*. The iconic volatile black marks and shapes mingle with vibrant colors to constitute tight and dense compositions. Interacting with each other and in conversation, each of the new paintings operates like a short-story or myth with an enigmatic protagonist that comes in and out of focus, ungraspable but visceral.

The show also includes two monumental prints created in a collaboration with Gemini GEL, the well-known printmaking workshop based in Los Angeles. Mehretu's exploration in printmaking takes an essential part in her practice, enabling her to pursue formal research which inform her painted works, as well as experimenting with new technical processes. Each print in the show is composed of ten aquatint etchings printed on paper, individually framed and hung as a grid. Both works used the exact same etching plates but were inked in different colors, each panel received five layers from five separate plates – a technical achievement with a total of fifty etching plates employed to complete the entire project.

For the first time, Mehretu invites Robin Coste Lewis to participate in one of her exhibitions, by presenting an original poem and installation commissioned by Mehretu. The text written and recorded by Lewis infiltrates the stairwell going to the lower gallery and leads visitors down into the vaulted space. The collaboration between Mehretu and Lewis in the show is the culmination of a political and aesthetic friendship between the two which grew over time, and which meditates on the relationship between the history of time, mark-making, human migrations, desire and the abstract. Mehretu and Lewis met in the late 1990's when they were both graduate students, and regularly attended the same lectures and conferences that took place during the heady 90s of the study of post-colonial theory, queer studies, and

critical race theory. From their first meeting, each recognized that their interests and obsessions engaged a shared conversation which continues until today, in this exhibition.

Intimacy, the installation by Lewis on display in the final space of the gallery, is a single-channel video composed of a selection of her family's photographic archive, which Lewis discovered by chance in an old suitcase after her grandmother's death. The sepia, tintypes, and black-and-white pictures subtly recount the history of her family who, along with millions of other Black families, fled the South as part of the Great Migration west. The video along with the accompanying poem by Lewis engages Mehretu's own history of immigrations as well her aesthetic concerns.

Julie Mehretu (b. 1970, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) lives and works in New York. She received a Bachelor of Art from Kalamazoo College, Michigan, studied at the University Cheik Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal, and received a Master of Fine Art with honors from The Rhode Island School of Design in 1997. She has since received many prestigious awards including the MacArthur Fellowship in 2005, the U.S. Department of State Medal of Arts Award in 2015, and the Liberty Award for Artistic Leadership, New York in 2018. In 2017, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Letters.

From 2019 to 2022, Mehretu's mid-career retrospective was presented by the LACMA, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, which co-organized it, and also traveling to the Walker Museum of Art, Minneapolis, and to the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Julie Mehretu's work has been exhibited extensively in international museums and biennials including at the Carnegie International (2004–05); Sydney Biennial (2006); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010); dOCUMENTA (13) (2012); Sharjah Biennial (2015); Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2017); Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain (2018); Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, UK (2019); and the 58th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia (2019).

Robin Coste Lewis (b. 1964, Compton, California) is the outgoing poet laureate for the city of Los Angeles where she now lives and works. In 2015, her debut poetry collection *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, which examined the fraught history of art, gender, and race, won the National Book Award in poetry—the first time a poetry debut by an African American had ever won the prize in the National Book Foundation's history, and the first time any debut had won the award since 1974. Lewis is at work on a new collection, *To the Realization of Perfect Helplessness* (Knopf, 2022), and teaches in NYU's low-residency in Paris and is writer-in-residence at the University of Southern California. Currently, she is the Joseph Brodsky Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome.

Lewis received her Bachelor of Art from Hampshire College in creative writing and comparative literature; a Master of Theological Studies degree in Sanskrit and comparative religious literature from the Divinity School at Harvard University; a Master of Fine Art in poetry at New York University; and a PhD from the University of Southern Creative Writing and Literature Program.

¹ Julie Mehretu in conversation with Phong H. Bui, *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 2021

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