

GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

In the LOGIN: **SPENCER LEWIS Bubbles**

5 NOV 2022 – 21 JAN 2023

Opening: Saturday, November 5, 2022, noon – 4pm

Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder is delighted to present paintings by Spencer Lewis, his first solo exhibition in Austria. In four large-scale paintings, Lewis continues his frenetic approach that draws and expands upon the legacies of 20th century abstraction. In so doing, Lewis enacts a wide array of gestures, varying from the misty smudge to the muscular contour, each carrying a distinct function and weight, which are layered and maneuvered into surprising iterations. They result in vivid coagulations of marks, all informed by the artist's memories, emotional states, and his ongoing process.

That Lewis sets upon his project on unprimed jute, a coarse woven cloth in production for millennia, materially heightens the energy of his painterly vocabulary. His most forceful gestures – those sinewy ribbons of color – mirror jute's fibrous quality; and in turn, his stains, sprays, and smudges disperse over its fuzzy surface, which Lewis brushes into that of a fine sweater before he begins painting. Commonly used to make rope, bags, and other durable products, it is an appropriate stage on which Lewis can translate innumerable fierce painterly events, tangling them into pictorial space. And this is enacted in the literal sense too: His paintings get dragged around, rubbed against, and impressed upon by physical exertion, as much as they undergo the irreversibility of pigmented materials on their unprimed surfaces. All of his paintings are *lived through*, having undergone necessary physical and creative duress.

One could see this as a response to the conceits of 20th century abstraction, which among them, sought so-called truth and honesty in materials, including a transcendent order. But along with figuration and other modes of painting, it became the undead in light of its refused obsolescence. Lewis appears to borrow lightly from both sides of this coin – exploiting material possibility, wringing it for aesthetic and emotional value, even to the risk of its annihilation under physical duress – but refusing to make this process the overt subject. His paintings hold this dialectic lightly underneath more pressing matters, which address the potentialities of paint and its application, color, and how all of these vectors are influenced by experience, impulsivity, and chance.

This reveals itself though Lewis' maneuvering of certain color motifs over one another in multi-directional line work. They array out and point to the dense accumulations of paint and stains that undergird them. They do not actually depict the decomposition of stars but represent this pictographically to some extent. They embrace the painterly byproducts of process, which runs in counter to the efficiency of a streamlined technique, making covert reference to Lewis' cultural upbringing during which the crackly hiss of a record or tape, and the messiness of ephemera, was prized. These qualities are fed by personal memory and happenstance in the studio, which are the radiations, the stuff stars emit, from the fulcrums of each composition.

Max Maslansky

SPENCER LEWIS, born 1979 in Hartford, Connecticut, lives and works in Los Angeles. He studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and the University of California, Los Angeles.

His works have been shown in many group exhibitions such as at The Mass, Tokyo; the MAS, Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerpen; the Lowell Ryan Projects, Los Angeles; the Art Movement, Los Angeles; and the Irvine Fine Arts Center, Irvine.