

Francis Offman

26th April - 27th May 2023

Herald St is pleased to announce its second solo exhibition with Francis Offman, taking place in the gallery's East London premises. It features large-scale paintings made in his studio in Bologna as well as small works on paper developed at the start of the year during a residency at Gasworks in London. In his recent output, Offman continues an abstract practice which incorporates repurposed papers, fabrics, and substances loaded with global and personal histories. His new works reveal vivid surfaces composed and coloured with intuition, with some elements carefully chosen for their geographic potency and others which appeared to the artist purely by chance.

Rooted in Offman's work is an ecology of materials. Each item used to construct his wall hangings has been found or gifted – from a friend's leftover paints and canvases to off-season fabric samples, and spent grounds from Offman's daily coffee gathered over months and dried in the summer heat. Rivers of gauzy bandages meander across his surfaces; these were discarded by Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (MAMbo) after they had expired. Some pieces are punctuated with swatches of floral cotton which recall *ankara* wax cloths, widely recognised as being traditionally West African but initially imported into the continent from the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. Offman is from Rwanda and emigrated to Italy with his family following the civil war and genocide in 1994, and his dual upbringing in Africa and Europe has made him acutely aware of the geohistorical narratives of certain materials. In another notable example, the coffee which textures much of his work is a primary commodity in African countries including his native Rwanda, and while grown nowhere in Italy it is embraced there as a beloved national drink. Through considered, yet lyrical, inclusions of such items, the artist nods to the nuanced realities which underpin commonly held associations.

Offman employs colours and textures suffused with memories, many taken from the flora and fauna encountered in his childhood. Within a blue expanse glimmers strips of wallpaper reminiscent of silvery fish scales. In another passage, an amorphous shape has the green and yellow markings of an insect, marbled and veined through the addition of coffee. Along the length of the windows, works on paper in Indian yellow and jewel-toned greens, pinks, and blues lie in display. Offman speaks of the wide blue ground in the monumental painting anchoring the exhibition as an ocean, a subject he has deeply considered while preparing his installation for this year's Liverpool Biennial. At once embracing its source of life and wonder, the artist has recently studied its darker history as the conduit for slave ships which built the city's fortune. At the same time, Offman allots no judgment nor precise meaning to such subjects and objects embedded in his works, offering an arena where darkness and beauty meet in sublimity and allowing an infinite number of potential readings.

The paintings and works on paper in the exhibition carry a dynamism and energy, offering the eye a surface to watch, rather than to see. With textures ranging from matte opacity and coarse grids to iridescent shine, Offman's pieces are never two dimensional, buckling through the push and pull of inlaid cards and cottons and stiffened with a mixture of Bolognese plaster. The artist describes his work as increasingly instinctual and meditative: 'painting is like breathing'. With this presentation Offman has flowed through the construction of his pieces, tearing and pasting and painting to create abstractions which immerse and evoke.

Text by Émilie Streiff

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Front Space (Clockwise from left)

Untitled
2023
Acrylic, paper, cotton, coffee grounds,
Bolognese plaster on cotton
30 x 46 cm / 11.8 x 18.1 in
HS19-FO8288P

Untitled
2023
Acrylic, paper, cotton, coffee grounds,
Bolognese plaster on cotton
252 x 196 cm / 99.2 x 77.2 in
HS19-FO8301P

Untitled
2023
Acrylic, paper, cotton, coffee grounds,
Bolognese plaster on cotton
58.4 x 60 cm / 23 x 23.6 in
HS19-FO8291P

Back space (Clockwise from left)

Untitled
2023
Acrylic, paper, cotton, coffee grounds,
Bolognese plaster on cotton
199.5 x 247.5 cm / 78.5 x 97.4 in
HS19-FO8302P

Untitled
2023
Acrylic, paper, cotton, coffee grounds,
Bolognese plaster on cotton
308 x 377.2 cm / 121.3 x 148.5 in
HS18-FO8249P

Untitled
2023
Acrylic, paper, coffee grounds,
Bolognese plaster on cotton paper
26 parts; each approx. 20 x 30 cm / 7.9 x 11.8 in
HS19-FO8298P

Untitled
2023
Acrylic, paper, cotton, coffee grounds,
Bolognese plaster on cotton
31 x 44 cm / 12.2 x 17.3 in
HS19-FO8286P

Francis Offman (b. 1987, Butare, Rwanda) lives and works in Bologna, Italy. Recent exhibitions include *Arte circolare*, MAXXI, Rome (2023); *Recent Acquisitions and Eternal Loves - Part I*, Nicoletta Fiorucci Collection, Rose de France, Monaco (2023); *The 8th Biennial of Painting: The 't' is Silent*, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Sint-Martens-Latem (2022); *Espressioni con Frazioni*, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin (2022); *Quotidiana: Paesaggio*, Quadriennale di Roma, Museo di Roma, Palazzo Braschi, Rome (2022); Herald St | Museum St, London (2021); *Painting in Person*, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea (2021); *Italy at Frieze*, Italian Embassy, London (2021); and Baleno International, Rome (2021). Earlier this year, Offman undertook a residency at Gasworks, London. His work is included in the collections of Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome; and Frac Bretagne, Rennes. Offman is currently participating in *RETROFUTURE* at MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome. Later in 2023, he will be included in *uMoya: The Sacred Return of Lost Things*, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool Biennial; *The Reason for Painting*, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry; *Italian Painting*, Triennale Milano, Milan; and *Museo delle Opacità*, Museo delle Civiltà Romana, Rome.