

Nathanaëlle Herbelin

Undivided Attention

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Press Release

For her debut exhibition at the gallery, *Undivided Attention*, French-Israeli artist Nathanaëlle Herbelin presents a series of paintings that capture the sensations of lived experience, and the intimate bond between art and life. People take centre stage. Friends, fellow artists, family members, her partner, neighbours, and occasionally strangers, are all captured in quiet portraits that bear witness to an intense act of physical and psychological observation. The settings are simple—bedrooms, bathrooms, domestic spaces, her studio—and the details sparse. In today's fast-paced, ever-connected world, Herbelin explores the subject of focus and what it means to give someone, or something, your undivided attention.

Nathanaëlle Herbelin's portraits capture moments of unguarded intimacy. People are often engaged in rituals that are performed without thinking, such as bathing or showering, or even just sleeping. Herbelin's delicate observation of her milieu is like a contemporary form of intimism, as practiced by Bonnard and Vuillard at the turn of the last century. In scenes painted from life, Herbelin is not so much documenting people's likenesses but their presence, a specific atmosphere and a point of connection, exchange or mutual understanding. Couples are a key theme throughout the exhibition, as depicted in the portrait of long-standing partners, *Simon et Sabine*, or in the recurrent paintings of Herbelin's partner, Jeremie. These images allude to love and fidelity, but also to a curiosity about the dynamics of enduring relationships. The paintings *Elisha* and *Florian*, on the other hand, which were both executed in 2022, hint at divergent lives. The former depicts the artist in New York, pregnant with her first child, Elisha, while the latter shows her friend, Florian, who lives life to the full in the Bronx. Both the same age, both artists, but separated by an ocean, both literally and figuratively, as their lives are so different.

Herbelin's works are also characterised by simplified forms and a deliberate flatness, both of which allow colour to shine as an expressive medium in its own right. Her palette is typically one of powdery, neutral shades enlivened by areas of pure, bright colour: the yellow wall-hanging carpet in *Undivided Attention*, the cobalt cardigan in *Elisha*, and the emerald studio sofa, for example. At times, works also reference each other as seen in the same patterned rug in both *Elisha* and *Florian*, creating a resonance within the body of work. An enigmatic work in the exhibition, *Diner avec oiseaux*, is a palimpsest in which two different paintings merge to create a surreal, almost mystical image. Herbelin often reuses canvases, painting over earlier works that retain a ghostly presence in the more recent one. As here, where a dinner party was painted both across, but also around, a pedagogical painting of birds. In this scene, the quotidian and other-worldly converge.

Other paintings, which include still lives, interiors, landscapes and animals, are painted from photographs or memory. Like snapshots, or visual souvenirs, they depict objects, places and situations that are lodged in the artist's mind. And while Herbelin's oeuvre often feels both placeless and timeless, it nevertheless charts a process of movement and displacement between cities such as New York, Strasbourg, Paris and Tel Aviv, or the rural setting of her grandparents' house in the South of France.

In turning her attention to intimate moments of domesticity, Nathanaëlle Herbelin invites us to look more closely at the minutiae of the world around us. Capturing such moments implies a degree of filtration, or the withdrawal from certain things to focus more intently on others. The French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil described complete attention as a state of unconsciousness: 'understanding comes only when we let go of ourselves and allow the other to grab our full attention. In order for the reality of the other's self to fully invest us, we must first divest ourselves of our own selves.' Herbelin treads the same path. She does not convey action or a specific viewpoint in her oeuvre, be it political or personal, but rather an open, receptive and non-judgemental attitude to life.

Born in Israel in 1989 to a French father and an Israeli mother, Nathanaëlle Herbelin obtained a Master of Fine Arts degree from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2016, during which time she was invited to participate in an exchange program at The Cooper Union, New York. Recent solo and group exhibitions include French Institute of Tel Aviv (2022), Umm Al Fahem Art Center (2021), Yishu 8 prize, George V Art Centre, Beijing (2021), Passerelle Art Center, Brest (2020), Bétonsalon, Paris (2019), the Beaux-Arts Museum of Rennes (2018), Collection Lambert, Avignon (2017) and Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris (2017). Early 2024, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris will organise a presentation dedicated to Herbelin's paintings in dialogue with selected works from the museum's collection.

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