

Eleanor Swordy

Busy Signal

First Floor, 41 Dover Street, London W1S 4NS

21 September – 28 October 2023

Opening: Thursday, 21 September, 6 – 8 pm

'Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.'

– Martin Buber

Galerie Max Hetzler, London is pleased to present *Busy Signal*, a solo exhibition of new work by **Eleanor Swordy** and the artist's inaugural solo exhibition with the gallery.

Painters can be reluctant to acknowledge the anxiety of beginnings. A judgmental stare issues from the void of each fresh canvas. The vehicle for creation – oil paint, that slippery customer – may be temporarily hated, as if it were an obstacle to action. Temperament dictates whether this drama is acknowledged by the artist or else conveniently disavowed. But the path of disavowal can never be wholly successful. In these new works by Eleanor Swordy, such drama remains visible in allegorical form.

Swordy's confident brushwork offers resolution, while each work's *mise-en-scène* tells another, more complicated story. In each painted tableau a figure interacts with its environment, or with another figure, by way of a gesture. In every case this gesture is mediated, either literally or symbolically, by an intervening object or tool.

In *Around the Block* a dog walker waves at a woman pushing a pram. A melancholic figure of carved stone blocks the line of sight between them, its surface pitted either by erosion, attack, or carving gone awry. The statue's eyes are downcast, like those of a woman with a shopping trolley who is walking nearby.

Both *Sidewalk Cellar* and *Around the Block* feature containers (the woman's trolley, crates of foodstuffs) which Swordy has painted as two-dimensional grids, flush with the picture plane. Their incidental geometry stands as a reminder of the paintings' objecthood. Juxtaposed with these are various devices to suggest distance or recession: both linear and aerial perspective in *Around the Block*, an advertisement's tilted plane in *Sidewalk Cellar*.

In the latter work, perspective has been violently warped. While we see the tiled pavement from directly above, stacked crates and a traffic cone are shown side-on. Gravity, too, seems twisted out of true. Some objects appear to have been sucked towards the picture plane, while the man emerging from a cellar (as, too, the dog in *Around the Block*, who is like an extension of its owner's wave) seems to stretch up or away into another level of pictured space.



Eleanor Swordy, *Summer Flowers*, 2023
Photo: Sebastian Bach

'Every means is an obstacle.' The woman ponders her schematic trolley, the man his lugged crate of stuff, with a mournful or puzzled look, as if wondering at the alchemy of three-dimensional figuration itself, or the latent life hidden within inert paint.

Consider too the bowstring, pulled taut by a tree-bound hunter, in *With All My Might*. This finds its echo in the angled shaft of the wheat-paster's brush in *Pasting*. The clothesline in *Taking It In* also belongs to this family of linear objects, acting as a support for a passage of drapery, which in its turn reiterates the dimensions of the canvas itself. All are like ambiguous umbilical cords, facilitators, intermediaries.

The high-tech bow's elaborate curves suggest a kind of modernist construction. This object occupies centre stage, standing out against an impressionist forest, which is like a backdrop painted in a borrowed style. A functional intermediary between eye and prey, the bow is here recast as an object of contemplation – for us, if not for the hunter, who seems content to look through it and ignore its enigmatic shape. It plays a similar role to the drying cloth and the torn posters, both of which stand as more obvious instances of *mise en abyme*, or representations of representation. The hunter is another stand-in for the viewer (though one whose instrumental attitude we should not ourselves, perhaps, imitate).

Each of these linear objects (brush, string, leash) might be read as metaphors for the painter's tools, which mediate her gestures in her search for an image. Meanwhile the figures, in their different attitudes and situations (appearing variously distracted, baffled, or absorbed in their work), could be read as comments upon the different styles of looking, characteristic of both artist and viewer.

Patrick Price

Eleanor Swordy (*1987, Paris) lives and works in New York. The artist's work has been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including *BodyLand*, curated by Lauren Taschen, at Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, in 2022. In 2023, Swordy held the position of Visiting Artist Lecture, BFA, at the School of Visual Arts, New York; and in 2008 was awarded the Rothenberg Travel Fellowship in Berlin. Her work is in the collection of Pérez Art Museum, Miami.

Further exhibitions and events

Paris:

8 September – 21 October 2023

Katharina Grosse

The Bedroom

46 & 57, rue du Temple, 75004 Paris

Berlin:

13 September – 21 October 2023

Paul McCarthy

Them as Was Is

organized by Cornelius Tittel

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin

15 September – 28 September 2023

Albert Oehlen, Richard Prince, Rudolf Stingel

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

15 September – 28 October 2023

Beatriz Milhazes

Paisagem em Desfile

Goethestraße 2/3, 10623 Berlin

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