

Stewart Uoo

Dryad

14 March - 13 April 2024

For his second solo exhibition at Galerie Buchholz, Stewart Uoo (*1985 in California, lives and works in New York) looked back at sketches he made while sitting in lecture classes at art school in Germany in 2008. They're body/mindscape with multiplying curves and heels and eyes. Like Surrealism at its best, these drawings are not only daydreams but reach like crowbars to pry open a collective unconscious, and maybe some anti-systemic dysphoria. His recent painting *Secret Guru Yoga Palden Lhamo (s/o to Leidy)* picks up one of those early line drawings and places it as a passenger on a mythic three-eyed mule riding over a pool of blood. It's a Dharma Protector portrait that gives the student doodle its due as a fragment of something primordial. Schooldays detachment develops into Buddhist non-attachment.

Contemplating Non-Dualism I-III, painted using long, color-soaked reeds, sticks, and brushes, navigate the aesthetic terrain of what makes a line, a form, or a collection of marks legible as a sign or not. They suspend the finding. Past bodies of work by Uoo have run accelerationist or sci-fi, whereas this show decelerates, peels back the surface of things, consults the personal archive. But in all of his work, there's a quality of not looking away.

Birthday Flowers honors a long dehydrated gesture from friends, rendered on silk with the delicate brittleness of gongbi style painting. For *Dryad*, flayed red and black veins of acrylic, which were applied with the marshy leaves of a cattail, burn off of a torso, moving like streams of rain on a car's windowpane. Two paintings add public glimpses of life in New York City - a neighbor passed out on a bed of tread-metal; two guys clutched on a small scooter waiting at a crosswalk.

The East River, though we call it that, isn't one in actuality. It's an estuary, a liquid limb that reaches between a bay and a sound. Uoo's photos of the East River's waves, which echo Peter Hujar's 1970s images of the Hudson, look like lace mirages lapping over each other. They were printed on thin adhesive that separates from its backing when dipped in water, a process normally used for custom car culture and decorating the barrels of guns. When rebuilding East River Park a couple years ago, for a plan to stave off flooding, the city famously cut down one thousand trees living along the bank. Even for the dryads, rest and rootedness is fleeting.

Annie Ochmanek