

Cece Philips  
*Conversations Between Two*  
September 26 – November 15, 2024  
Opening reception Thursday, September 26, 6–9 PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *Conversations Between Two*, Cece Philips' (b. 1996 in London, UK) third solo exhibition with the gallery and her first in Milan. This exhibition of new works on canvas is presented alongside a play written as a companion piece by writer Lucy Mcllgorm.

In Cece Philips' atmospheric paintings, the night is an omnipresent figure, invisible but felt and permeating spaces and situations with a deep blue tinge. Against this nightly backdrop, women converse, gather, reflect and wander, both actors and observers of the life that emerges in those blue hours between dusk and dawn. In *Conversations Between Two*, Philips' figures leave the streets of an anonymous cosmopolis for the velvet seats of a theatre, sitting in a deep longing to be consumed by the seemingly infinite sense of possibility emanating from the stage. "Voyeurs with permission for a night", reflects Philips. The ideas of spectatorship and narrative prevail in her practice, here explored through the device of the theatre, a space in which desire, voyeurism and storytelling converse.

"The first feminist gesture is to say: "OK, they're looking at me. But I'm looking at them." The act of deciding to look, of deciding that the world is not defined by how people see me, but how I see them." These words by director and screenwriter Agnès Varda speak to the relationship between the one observing and the one being observed, an interplay at the centre of Cece Philips' artistic reflection, as she investigates the dynamics of power and gender in the act of looking. Under her brush, the subject of observation is now doing the observing, performer of the mundane suddenly sitting in the audience, witness of the spectacle.

Cece Philips trades her blues for warm shades of red, as the temperature rises on the painting's surface, translating the heat in the pulsing atmosphere of the theatre. "Red, red, red, everywhere" describes one of the characters written by Lucy Mcllgorm, as she recalls her first time experiencing the theatre. In Philips' compositions, red engulfs the figures, suggesting the sound of indistinct chatter, of applause, perhaps music, and inducing a subtle yet palpable warmth into the night's blue quietness. A certain silence is still perceptible in Philip's works, the kind one only hears in the anticipation before the first act, that lingers in the pause of a dialogue or in the delicate tension of a first encounter, before being broken by the sound of a voice, as evokes the piece titled *The Silent Awe of Strangers (soon to be friends)*.

'*Conversations Between Two*', the painting lending its title to the exhibition depicts friends of the artist exchanging playful and secret whispers, capturing the kinship forged in a moment of shared awe and delight. Still, the title of the exhibition holds further dualities and nuances, revealing connections beyond that of two characters interacting in a verbal exchange. There is the ongoing dialogue between painting and theatre, painted and written characters, as well as interior and exterior selves. The two in conversation are also performer and audience, the audience sitting in the theatre, but also the audience observing the painting, forming an interactive *mise en abyme*. As the viewer of the piece titled *Marionettes*, we suddenly find ourselves performing the act of spectatorship for a painted audience, as we stand behind the fourth wall broken by the attentive gaze the characters place upon us.

By being the witness of a performance, one is able to have their own interior thoughts reflected back to them in an exterior space, blurring private and public selves, while fiction seems to overlap with reality. In *Conversations between Two*, painting and theatre alike reveal nuances on the complexity of life, shedding light on the quotidian performance we give on the world's stage.

Since her debut in 2021, Philips has presented solo exhibitions at Post Gallery, Zurich (2024), Peres Projects, Seoul (2023) and Berlin (2022); ADA Contemporary Art Gallery, Accra (2022); Post Gallery Zurich (2022 and 2021); and HOME, London (2021). Recent group exhibitions include GRIMM, Amsterdam (2023); Harper's, East Hampton (2023); Cob Gallery, London (2023); Ojiri Gallery, London (2022). She is currently part of the two person exhibition *Digestif* curated by Edoardo Monti at Palazzo Monti, Brescia.

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