

## Mathew Cerletty

### *Bended Knee*

25th September — 2nd November

Herald St is delighted to present Mathew Cerletty's first solo exhibition in London, taking place at the gallery's Museum St premises. Titled *Bended Knee*, the presentation features seven paintings which continue the artist's attentive renderings of everyday objects and body parts crisply set against flat expanses of colour. The works quickly escalate in scale from intimate to monumental, at once giving off an air of plastic sterility, triggering a familiar emotional pull, and inciting palpable self-awareness at a bodily level.

The title of the exhibition evokes Hollywood romances and Hallmark celebrations; Cerletty presents us instead with a naked knee at giant proportions, cutting a right angle against a periwinkle ground. This wry, deadpan approach characterises his work: other subjects include a set of gleaming pet bowls, a sink without its taps, and a fresh bar of soap, all unadorned and often stripped of contents or functional components. Giving an initial impression of objectivity, the works provide pieces of a narrative centred on Cerletty's life, a surrounding of domestic goods and tools of artistic production. Many are continuations of series – the paintbrush, the pencil skirt, and the Kohler basin – framing the same subject in different fields of colour. Others also nod to earlier works: the orange of the American pill bottle finds a parallel in the Manila envelopes of a 2020 painting, an uncanny echo in standard-issue dyes. Cerletty carefully sources images from stock photographs as well as from life, sometimes commissioning professional photographs to capture a composition. He has honed and refined his way of working over decades, becoming attuned to the understated objects which command a charged presence. As he once stated, 'the images that become paintings have had a lot of pressure put on them over time. They need to hit the bullseye conceptually, emotionally, and as formal oil paintings – and images that do all that are hard to come by.'

Cerletty cites a number of great American painters as touchstones, from Jasper Johns to Ellsworth Kelly, and Ed Ruscha to Brice Marden. The marked influence of Robert Gober and Bruce Nauman is most evidently felt in the titular painting as well as *Pink Vanity*, works which instil a visceral consciousness in viewers. Many of the paintings relate to health and cleanliness, concerns which seeped into his work during the pandemic years. Portraiture dominated Cerletty's early output, and *Bended Knee* continues a recent return of the body, albeit in sensuous, anonymous fragments. The artist largely eliminated figures in his work nearly twenty years ago, deciding they felt like a third wheel in the conversation between his paintings and their observers. Like many of his post-war forbears, he encourages access and dialogue with his canvases, inviting human reactions and responses to the familiar scenes freshly presented in his emphatic visual language.

Cerletty's works act as signage, beaming from the walls with vivid intensity. Within these simple, generic items are glimmers of wonder. The artist dismisses the assumed cultural value to the material he chooses as his subjects, prioritising the importance of 'seeing something as beautiful, that no one else thinks is beautiful.' The paintings call out for us to keep looking, capturing the magical obscenity of monumentalising such banal *things*.

Text by Émilie Streiff

## Mathew Cerletty

### *Bended Knee*

25th September — 2nd November

Front space  
(Anti-clockwise)

*Empty*

2024

Oil on linen

27.9 x 35.6 x 2.2 cm / 11 x 14 x 0.9 in

HS20-MCY8736P

*Pink Vanity*

2024

Oil on linen

134.6 x 190 x 4 cm / 53 x 74.8 x 1.6 in

HS20-MCY8738P

*Bended Knee*

2024

Oil on linen

177.8 x 157.5 x 4 cm / 70 x 62 x 1.6 in

HS20-MCY8737P

Back space

(Anti-clockwise)

*Long Story Short*

2024

Oil on linen

175.3 x 146 x 4 cm / 69 x 57.5 x 1.6 in

HS20-MCY8739P

*Food & Water*

2024

Oil on linen

177.8 x 177.8 x 4 cm / 70 x 70 x 1.6 in

HS20-MCY8742P

*Nosedive*

2024

Oil on linen

111.8 x 87.6 x 3.3 cm / 44 x 34.5 x 1.3 in

HS20-MCY8741P

*Reception*

2024

Oil on linen

152.4 x 193 x 4 cm / 60 x 76 x 1.6 in

HS20-MCY8740P

Mathew Cerletty (b. 1980, Milwaukee) lives and works in New York. Previous exhibitions include *Mineral Spirits*, Standard, Oslo (2023); *True Believer*, Karma, Los Angeles (2022); *Full Length Mirror*, The Power Station, Dallas (2020); *Use Your Illusion*, Herald St, London (2018); *Per formare una collezione: The Show Must Go\_ON*, Museo Madre, Naples (2017); and *Flatlands*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016). His work is held in the institutional collections of Aishti Foundation, Beirut; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; Buffalo AKG Art Museum; Milwaukee Art Museum; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.