

Nathlie Provosty  
*Threshold Speech*  
7 Nov–20 Dec 2025  
39 Walker

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*Threshold Speech*, the title of Nathlie Provosty's new exhibition, is a phrase taken from poet Paul Celan. It references the limitations of communicating that which exists outside of language. In an attempt to build a vocabulary for the unspeakable, Celan created a poetics of the "counter word" that upended linguistic conventions. Similarly, Provosty's approach to abstraction subverts the dominant draconian demands placed on our attention. Through subtlety, sensuality, and a pictorial language that eludes, betrays, and rewards, the paintings act as receptacles of alternative communication systems.

A friend of the artist once said of Provosty's work, "You swallowed abstraction and took an x-ray." The comment is a useful entry point into Provosty's paintings: they perform auscultation—a term for listening to the internal sounds in your own body—by humming, twisting, and wrapping inward, while likewise vibrating outward.

At times forms within the paintings disappear altogether when viewed from certain angles, only to brightly animate when seen from the opposite side of the room. Shallow, overlapping planes conjoin to suggest atmospheric depth. The surfaces are saturated by touch, conveying them into the realm of erotics. As the inside seems to turn outside, these apparent inversions remind us that skin is an organ and paintings are all skin.

The newest developments in Provosty's work include rowdy, gestural brushstrokes and drawn charcoal lines integrated with methodical, planar surfaces that in tandem display a wider physical range of oil paint's capabilities. Color reigns supreme. Rich magentas, violets, umbers, pinks, Prussian blues and others relationally activate one another.

In the titular painting of the exhibition, a medium scale canvas, an abstracted figure-eight mobius strip weaves through staggered planes of light and shadow. An incendiary red line runs along the painting's perimeter but is left just barely visible at the painting's compositional center. The largest paintings in the exhibition are diptychs, each comprised of two horizontal canvases stacked vertically to expose a thin gap of wall between them. In *Communicating para-acoustically with the future*, a line from poet Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, the darker elements might resemble charcoal and steel as much as oil; a closer examination reveals a varying directionality of brushstrokes to disrupt the surface sheen. In the bottom panel of the same work, Provosty cloaks a myriad of textures in a dense veil of warm blacks and cobalt teals. *Breathcrystal*, rendered in an inverse palette of semiopaque lilac-whites and *Solar*, an ebullient golden foil to the others, together create a trifecta of light and its emissary, the dark.

Provosty has also included a new sequence of Icons, a recurring series of small format paintings. The trompe l'oeil shadows within the Icons possess a monumental presence, even at their modest size; misaligned registers dissolve into chromatic luminosity of contradictory color gradients shimmering between conjoined edges. Provosty's engagement with abstraction has long forgone the bud of representation in favor of the blossom of sensation, held within the parameters of the unknown. It's a decidedly sub-lingual (or supralingual?) place, pregnant with individual agency for one's own thoughts, feelings, ideas, and intuitions.

Nathlie Provosty (b. 1981, lives and works in New York) has had solo exhibitions at ICA Milano, Italy (2023) and Risorgimento Museum, Turin, Italy (2018). Recent group exhibitions include a dual presentation with works by Carol Rama at Collezione Ramo, Milan, Italy and "To Bend the Ear of the Outer World," curated by Gary Garrels at Gagosian, London, United Kingdom.

Her works are in the collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, New York; Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California; Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, Florida; Colby Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine; Dorsky Museum of Art, New Paltz, New York and internationally in the Olgiati Collection, Lugano, Switzerland and PART, Palazzi dell'Arte Rimini, Italy.