

Julie Mehretu

*SEXTANT*

21 September – 3 November 2018

White Cube Mason's Yard

White Cube is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Julie Mehretu at Mason's Yard. Featuring large-scale paintings and etchings, the exhibition highlights Mehretu's use of gestural abstraction as a conduit for evocative and charged emotion and intellectual enquiry.

Glenn Ligon has described the artist's work as 'traversed by history [...] grounded in urgent political and social questions while simultaneously troubling the limits of abstract painting.'<sup>1</sup> In these new paintings, which continue from the 'Conjured Parts' series begun in 2015, Mehretu employs a broad spectrum palette to create powerful, animated, complex canvases. Marking a continued departure from her earlier work which focused on a layered language of mapping and architectural detail, these paintings take the immediacy of a news photograph as their starting point. These include images of such recent pivotal junctures as the rallies of independence in Catalonia; the voracious wild fires of California; the violent white supremacy rally and counter rally in Charlottesville, Virginia; the instantaneous outbreak of Muslim ban protests throughout the United States; and the Grenfell Tower fire in London. Beginning with a process of obscuration where the found image is blurred and manipulated through Photoshop, it is then airbrushed onto canvas as an abstract departure point. Reduced to a background haze of colour, each painting is then built up through an extensive, intricate layering process using screen printing, ink and acrylic marks which are drawn, painted, airbrushed or erased. The original image, now just a blur, is metaphorically nuanced and elliptical, existing as a ghostly background presence whose visible highlights and eruptions of colour on the canvas surface pronounce moments of action and possible shifts of axis. This confluence and dispersion of energetic and decisive marks is respondent to the varied histories the photographs invoke.

Less structured than previous work and characterised by their intensely animated and vital surfaces, Mehretu's paintings suggest a suspended moment ripe with possibility, defining what Suzanne Cotter has identified as a 'mobility' inherent in her painterly language. Part of a continual state of becoming, where marks reliant on effacement and erasure relate to action, they allow for new thematic possibilities. As Cotter has written, they are '[...] fundamentally, about the individual within the complex social and political dynamics that inform the nature of the world in which we live.'<sup>2</sup> Urging the viewer to look, question and take time,

Mehretu ignites the potential of painting to carry political significance, serving as an energising and motivational force that draws vital nerves and narrative lines with both the history of modernist abstraction as well as that of engaged political thought.

A new series of prints, made with master printmaker Case Hudson at Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles, are exuberantly colourful and large in scale, in part inspired by the artist's recent visit to the Mogao caves in China. In these works, a multitude of varied black lines, marks and shapes overlaid on psychedelic backgrounds suggest a form of automatic writing that incorporates different tools and techniques. Conveying both the charged immediacy of political graffiti and the layers of scrawl and fly-posting that builds up in urban locales, they also reference mid-century abstraction; the poetic crescendo of their gestural profusion appearing contained only by the limits of the paper itself.

- 1 Glenn Ligon. 'On the Ground', *Grey Paintings*, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2017
- 2 Suzanne Cotter. 'The Alien Discontinuum: On Painting and Participating in the work of Julie Mehretu', *A Universal History of Everything and Nothing*, Julie Mehretu, Serralves and Botin, 2017

#### BIOGRAPHY

Julie Mehretu was born in Addis Ababa in 1970 and lives and works in New York. Mehretu has exhibited extensively including solo exhibitions at Serralves Museum, Porto, Portugal (2017); Centro Botín, Santander, Spain (2017); Gebre Kristos Desta Center, Addis Ababa (2016); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010); Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2009); The Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan (2007) touring to Williams College Art Gallery, Williamstown, Massachusetts and North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh (both 2008); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain, touring to Kunstverein Hannover, Germany and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark (2006–07); St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri (2005); and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, touring to REDCAT, Los Angeles and Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, (2003–04).

Selected group exhibitions include 10th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2014); Document 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); 15th Biennale of Sydney (2006); 26th Bienal de São Paulo (2004); 54th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (2004); Whitney Biennial, New York (2004); and 8th Istanbul Biennial (2003).

In 2005 Mehretu was the recipient of the American Art Award from the Whitney Museum of American Art, as well as the prestigious MacArthur Fellows Award. In 2015 she was awarded the US Department of State Medal of Arts Award.

In 2017, a monumental two-part painting, 'HOWL, eon (I, II)' commissioned by San Francisco Museum of Modern Art was unveiled as a major, long-term installation in the lobby of the museum. Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, UK, will host an exhibition of Mehretu's works on paper presented alongside 'Louise Bourgeois: Artist Rooms' in January 2019. An upcoming survey co-organised by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, opens at LACMA in Autumn 2019 and will tour to other major US venues throughout 2020.

White Cube Mason's Yard is open  
Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm.  
Admission is free.

For further information, please contact  
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