

# KÖNIG GALERIE

## HELEN MARTEN | FIXED SKY SITUATION

12 JANUARY – 24 FEBRUARY 2019  
ST. AGNES | NAVE  
OPENING: 11 JANUARY, 6 – 9 PM

Helen Marten works across sculpture, painting and writing to create a body of work that questions the stability of the material world and our place within it. Alluding to language, systems and intentionality, her work across all media sets out to imagine the miraculous substructure beneath the veneer of our habitual lives.

The peculiar juxtapositions of material that Marten creates give attention to things that do not necessarily have a defined physical shape in the world: the notions of labour and work; the emotional capacity of paint or the verbal distortions of language are all bought into conversation. Whilst their complex references might not be made immediately explicit to the viewer there is something alchemic in the way the materials are collided and ideas are often communicated through the obstinate willfulness of the finished form. Hieroglyphic, yet charged with significance Marten's material language is one that is tangentially spun out but rooted always to a diagrammatic logic.

There is a luscious, generous quality to the production of these works, with the strategies of layering and contingency bordering on obsessive. Metaphor is a widely used device and smaller groupings of objects - tableaux within a larger structure - could be described as articulations of verbs themselves difficult to parse. These works operate on the premise of an expanding set of 'qualities': motif and body, corruption and skeleton.

Fixed Sky Situation unfolds a 'them' sculpture, an 'us' sculpture and a 'you' sculpture. Each explores conditions of exclusion or corroboration, the shared or reciprocal experience of wielding a body with form and language, or the simple motifs of directional force - the compulsion to move from one territory to another. Each sculptural work enacts a diagram, making ambivalent social demands on its viewer. All bodies are people and all people preserve to some degree the lines of those who went before them.

Each of these works is bordered by a series of silk-screen paintings whose single and plural subjects seek to trace the snaking fever of a body's pulse. They are chapters, each identically sized. Within the picture planes actions of authorial mapping spiral out: a census is taken, familial possibilities plotted, vanishing points spilled and recollected. And all this whilst multiple animal votives seek to violate planes of colour or abstraction. This is the chemical delirium of Nylon ink. Crests of paint overlap in thousands of layers, marking process with all the elastic springiness and potential of a rubber ball.

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OPENING HOURS  
TUE – SAT 10AM – 6PM  
SUN 12PM – 6PM

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There are 8 new works in *Fixed Sky Situation*.

Marten spent 2017 working on her first novel, *The Boiled in Between*, which is forthcoming.

Helen Marten (b. 1985, Macclesfield, UK) lives and works in London. She was awarded the 2016 Turner Prize, and the inaugural 2016 Hepworth Prize for Sculpture. She was also the recipient of the LUMA Prize (2012) and the Prix Lafayette (2011).

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Drunk Brown House*, Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London (2016); *Eucalyptus, let us in*, Greene Naftali, New York (2016); *Parrot Problems*, Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany; *Oreo St. James*, Sadie Coles HQ, London (all 2014); *No borders in a wok that can't be crossed*, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson (NY), USA (2013); *Plank Salad*, Chisenhale Gallery, London; *Evian Disease*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris; *Almost the exact shape of Florida*, Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland (all 2012). Selected group shows include *Second Nature*, K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong (2017); the 20th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2016) and both the 55th and 56th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2013 and 2015); *Meanwhile... Suddenly, and Then*, Lyon Biennial, Lyon (2013); *New Pictures Common Objects*, MoMA PS1, New York (2012). Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Castello Di Rivoli, Turin, 2019 and Kunsthau Bregenz 2020.

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Text by Helen Marten

The presentation of *best self* is like carrying around multiple vessels of delicious liquid, dragging them up a hill and then sloshing the whole lot down your front with primal abandon: a comic opera of desperation. This is not public eminence but rather a crude dismantling of the facade called YOU. Looking at skin is like an allegory of reading. Washing it like turning the page. Public YOU and Private YOU: one or the other is always prefiguring its own irrelevance and both are bound by the radiating expressions of the face or the hands. Admitting ownership of a brain, like the growing of a population, is to perch on something solid and substantial for more than a second.

The signature or act of naming oneself is tied to a similar linguistic subjectivity. Even the initials of one's name wilt or bend on demand, as if racing along towards a newly melodic sense of being, a name breathed in italics like a synthetically chemical personhood dashing towards a black hole. The question might be how to start afresh. How to fluff up the soapsuds, peek out from the shower curtain and move on to another personality.

At that speed, something is always going to happen. You can follow it to the point of treachery.

Lines of writing connect to lines of universal matter: things move from a literal A to a literal B and en route, there is myth, misfortune, horror and luck. Intense molecular lives are positioned like photographs where we look at the remnants in high definition and say: *how could this have happened*. Socks, bedrolls, drainage – the whole micropolitics of a simple conversation is made part of the flow. Great aggregates of lives and people are difficult to smash into well-composed segments.

What might be done to sabotage terrestrial laws is to look at everything from above. The unique relationships between the bookkeeper, the butcher, the sailor, the walker, the dreamer, the fool are all lines joined at altitude. YOU, THEM, US: Is a misshapen figure with bumpy contours even a person at all? The great unconscious mass of a *people* is all at once fragile and awful and wondrous. Because remember: what is a body but a great barrel of protein rolled from one hoppy stink to another. Sludge is a stand in for bodies unwanted. It is run off, drainage, coagulation. Water unites and breaks us. Bodies recourse to their fluids, their water, their liquid in the abyss. Or back to their minerals, their calcium and phosphorus, shaking sugar into the hairs on ones arms just to notice the pores. A river too can be scorched dry. Or a kettle boiled so harshly it scales to lime on the spot. There are hundreds of millions of tons of salt in our Oceans. This is chemical fidelity, our mutual water fidelity.

We are hosted on this planet, we forget, but the house is the geometrical instrument which gives abstract things place for purpose. It holds sequences that connect with one another following specific coordinates. The house has its

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own peculiar cellular chemistry. Its code and its territory. The house has its organs, its sagging walls and ailing roofs. Even its decay is a type of architecture. An exploded-view-diagram maps the chaos and lends organisation to the direction that feet might take, the angle at which a tired bottom might perch to take in the view.

The Eames' picnic<sup>1</sup> taught us the speed of perspective interchange, how quickly that single second down on the earth feeling the personal resistance of a grass stem bent out of place can be replaced with the impossible cosmic vastness of the solar system. Assemblages are operations, notes heard and answered elsewhere in a new season. These powers of infinite reflex and remove remind that you cannot return from a clean break from reality, but you can claw your way back from the debris to find love or self in the dust.

Imagine a materially more abject version of that picnic: hats that cripple the necks of the heads who wear them; beer pumped through a duck who champions the ruffled spaces of patchwork and strange secretion; candles with their very own paradox of wax and food that resists itself, referencing number rather than nutrition. The air too is a fixed sky situation, watched eagerly by farmers or nomads who invent a new agriculture for their weird decelerations. All of us want to be held, but contingently, the way trauma across the globe makes it difficult to see all marks without assigning them each value. Maybe muscles solidify in fury or desperation. And in this way, the harder you try to describe the people and the chemistry of their peripheral space, the easier it is to picture animals.

<sup>1</sup> Powers of Ten, 1977