

The annexe

Helene Appel
Outside

4 July – 4 August 2019

Opening preview: Wednesday 3rd July, 6-9pm

The Annexe is excited to present a new body of works by Helene Appel. Painting on a 1:1 scale, distinctive to the artist's practice, the show comprises large life-like tree trunks, rendered in watercolour on heavy linen fabric.

The trees are made using a new technique, where the objects are 'cut-out' from the canvas, forming three-dimensional silhouettes. Through the act of cutting-out, Appel is ostensibly destroying painting; the canvas comes to life as an object in itself rather than an image-on-canvas stretched over a wooden frame. Similar to the attention we might give to someone whilst engaging in deep conversation, surroundings disappear completely, the only focus is what we see in front of us, in this case, trees.

Size plays an important factor here. When one thinks of a tree, the first association is with size (perhaps followed by age). Trees are tall, huge things, they reach clearly out of sight from above, their large branches extending upwards, but they also stretch deep into and under the earth as their roots penetrate through the ground and downwards. Appel's trees similarly extend upwards and outwards, but as paintings. They go beyond the conventions of ordinary painting, in a way that is similar to how abstract painters approached the canvas, except rather than extending the pictorial form through gesture, Appel's trees extend painting through the content of the picture itself. The only thing about the painting now is its tree-ness.

Trees have a strange relationship to gravity, they seem to defy it somehow. Their towering bodies rise many metres towards the sky, yet they don't bend or flop, they stand powerful and strong. Appel's trees retain the height of real trees, but don't hold on to any heaviness, they are lightweight. They straddle the space between something monumental and something delicate, in the same way that they sit on the boundary between sculpture and painting. The linen fabric is drawn down to the earth, creating a sense of depth and physicality that one experiences from sculpture, whilst simultaneously, the trees float flat against the wall like paintings.

Trees are understated participants in our ecosystem, we take them for granted. Connecting the sky with the earth, they create symbiotic relationships with creatures homed up above in their branches, as well as feeding the soil, plants and vegetation down below. They communicate with one another, passing vibrations through a network of fungi within the earth. Trees are active life-giving sources for us too. They breathe as we breathe. Extracting CO₂ from the atmosphere and transforming it into oxygen.

It is the tree's trunk that we first see when we encounter a tree close up. We experience its structure, and how its shape and texture is formed. The bark is something a tree produces by renewing itself from the inside out; the pressure created, as the inside pushes its way to the surface, creates the ripped and cracked exterior. The outside of the tree, is the part that we are familiar with. The artist has retraced and re-enacted the tree trunk through these works, depicting the bark as a watercolour drawing. The final result is close to how a real tree looks from the outside, but what we see here is an image.

Helene Appel was born in Karlsruhe, Germany (1976). She studied in Hamburg and London and now lives and works in Berlin. Selected solo exhibitions include: *Washing*, James Cohan Gallery, New York (2018); *Waves*, The Approach, London (2017); *Washing Up*, P420, Bologna (2016); James Cohan Gallery, New York (2014); *The Approach*, London (2013); *Kaiserringstipendium*, Kunstmuseum Goslar, Germany (2011). Recent group exhibitions include: *The Tiresome Truth*, ASC Gallery, London (2019); *Always the Real Thing*, White Crypt, London (2018); *Fickle Food Upon a Shifting Plate*, Studio Leigh, London (2017) *Kettle's Yard at The Hepworth Wakefield*, cur. Anthea Hamilton, The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield, UK; *Queensize*, Museum Arnhem, Arnhem, NL; *I Prefer Life*, The Weserburg, Bremen; *CORALE*, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Frigoriferi Milanese, Milan; *Is this living?*, The Approach, London (all 2016); *Painting Show - Part One*, Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich; *Tutta l'Italia e silenziosa*, cur. Davide Ferri, Reale Accademia di Spagna, Rome; *Salondergegenwart*, Hamburg; *Helene Appel, Olga Balema, Simon Logan*, Galerie Luis Campaña, Berlin (all 2015); *QUEENSIZE - Female Artists from the Olbricht Collection*, me Collections Room, Berlin (2014-2015); *SOME / THINGS*, Proyectos Monclova, Mexico City (2014); *Luce, Giorno: Helene Appel, Antonio Calderara*, P420, Bologna; *A Scene of Painting Today*, Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato (2013).

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