

Keltie Ferris

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7.9.2019–26.10.2019

Keltie Ferris is one of the most relevant painters of the generation born in the 1970s. Her painting embodies aspects of Performance Art, Abstract Modernism and the “storm of pictures” of digital image worlds. Her works combine spatial illusions with direct references to the body. For her series “Body Prints”, she used her own body as a “painting tool”, while her large-format paintings connecting sprayed, hand-painted and relief-like parts raise the complex interplay of body, space and identity to an abstract level. Ferris grasps painting as a personal index characterized by performative gender and body identities.



Weave/Cleave, 2019

oil and acrylic on canvas in two panels in the artist's frame,  
190,5 x 160 x 11,7 cm

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From the beginning, Keltie Ferris' works are produced with reference to her body. Earlier paintings feature superimposed and juxtaposed, sprayed and painted color surfaces and trigger associations with urban and digital landscapes. Ferris already describes these works as a “stage for her body”.

The artist's most recent works create a “physical contrast” between sprayed, brushed, and turpentine-obscured painting, on the one side, and relief-like elements consisting of marble dust mixed with paint, on the other. Canvases are assembled in a collage like way to form objects and the painting “expands” from the canvas beyond the frame.

Ferris mainly uses a spray gun to apply oil paint mixed with graphite dust in flowing lines. The physical speed required for this implies an active, “dancing” body. The work process is similar to Action Painting, but reveals greater emotional and factual distance, since the classic brush doesn't touch the canvas. The speed of the sprayed parts stands in contrast to the slow process of applying the pastose surfaces. Each relief is based on the paradoxical concept of “modeling a drawing as a color form” and is a tongue-in-cheek play with the notion of “coloring in a drawing”, as opposed to the in fact elaborate production process of these pastose surfaces in her paintings.

The contrast between illusionistic space and real “objecthood” creates a tension that actually involves the body of the viewer. In this sense, Ferris regards her new works as a “counterpart”:

“More and more now I’m sort of thinking of the painting as the actor. I would even go so far as to say if the painting doesn’t feel active and alive, if it feels passive, then it’s probably just not a good painting.”

Keltie Ferris has been producing her series of “Body Prints” since 2015, and one inevitably thinks of Yves Klein’s performances in the 1960s and the depiction of the female body in art history. However Ferris’ body is always dressed in a jeans shirt and pants, which she covers with oil paint and pigment dust and then presses against the paper as prints of her body, they are literally an “index” of her subjective identity, while simultaneously embodying an array of possible gender identities. Seriality and repetition as part of the work process of the Body Prints transfer the representation of the body into the political sphere, or as Ferris states:

“I want the work to be reflective of myself as a being in general, as well as a political actor. I wanted it to refer to the accumulation of those individuals as well — my multiple selves together, imagined armies of citizens.”



Member, 2018  
oil and powdered pigment on paper,  
101,6 x 66 cm

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#### Biographical note

Keltie Ferris’ (US 1977) works are part of renowned museum collections such as The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City or Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art (Oppenheimer Collection), Overland Park. In 2018 The Speed Art Museum in Kentucky dedicated a solo exhibition to Keltie Ferris. Recent solo exhibitions include „Body Prints and Paintings“ at the University Art Museum at SUNY Albany, New York (2016); „Paintings and Body Prints“ at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York (2015); „Keltie Ferris: Doomsday Boogie“ at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2014).

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