
SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES

(In which a murderous hairdresser donates his head to science,
with one restriction.)

Paintings by Anna Schuleit Haber

March 2 – April 15, 2018

Opening reception: Friday, March 2, 2018, 6 – 9 pm.

Abigail Ogilvy Gallery is proud to present *Scientific Purposes (In which a murderous hairdresser donates his head to science, with one restriction)*, a solo exhibition of paintings by Anna Schuleit Haber. The works in this show consist of ten abstract paintings on paper and linen that have been several years in the making. The seven works on paper are part of an ongoing series of 104 paintings called *The Voice Imitator*, which won a New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) grant in 2013. The series is inspired by a collection of short fiction by Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard. The larger paintings on linen preserve that same feeling of abstracted storytelling, although they further resist any definition, especially considering their size.

In her serial paintings, Anna Schuleit Haber explores and evokes Thomas Bernhard's long-standing obsession with intrigue, political corruption, trauma, and urban mystery. The absurdity of life that is present in the stories is amplified in the bold visual vocabulary of the paintings, especially when seen in context with each other. The approach of seriality has been a characteristic of Schuleit Haber's work for some time.

"I realized a few paintings into this series that Thomas Bernhard couldn't tear himself away from the repetition of his strange characters. Most of them are men, and most of them are tragic figures. In response, my paintings went rather quickly from more delicate, drawing-based works to gestural paintings."

Throughout the series, the paintings reflect the density and inconclusiveness of the stories without illustrating them. The painter's vocabulary seems oddly in tune with the writer's. But while Thomas Bernhard ends each of his stories without warning, always abruptly, in this series Schuleit Haber appears to provide a longer breath, a chance for a more unhurried encounter with the material. The resulting paintings are as layered and colorful, as they are strangely, mysteriously derived. By no means an automatic work, this series of paintings is, over the course of 104 works, heading in a mischievous, even hypnotic direction. Schuleit Haber engages with each of Bernhard's stories on her own terms, encouraging the possibility of a deeper viewing of the stirring, disturbingly contemporary content and narrative behind the work.

Schuleit Haber's dedication to process is apparent in the tangle of line and color that has been built up, dismantled, altered, and recreated with every layer. The paintings, both the works on linen and paper, have a memory, almost a consciousness, after undergoing so many transformations. The artist leaves portions of the underlying paper and linen exposed and allows the formation of her paintings to be part of the finished work. Schuleit Haber's works have been described as "mysterious and hypnotic," by Nanette Vonnegut in an essay for *Take Magazine*. "Her work looks as though her whole body is moving through it... explosive and seriously playful."

Her mark-making has a narrative quality to it; one could follow a single line and watch it shift and build as it crosses the piece. The various elements interact like characters in a story. Contained in every piece is an unfolding landscape of abstraction, with areas of tension where her lines are sharp and tightly bundled, and areas of release and revelation in fields of bold color, connected by threads that act as guides for the eye. "Perhaps the most poignant example of the terrain that Abstract Expressionism most wanted to inhabit: a visual poetry of mood over form," wrote Francisco Ricardo, author of "The Engagement Aesthetic: Experiencing New Media Art through Critique," about this work. Schuleit Haber's paintings invite us to let go of concrete readings and become immersed in them viscerally, physically, like strange, lucid landscapes of marks and paint.

The work in this exhibition has been made possible, in part, by artist fellowships from the Bogliasco Foundation, The Hermitage, NYFA, and the MacArthur Foundation.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Anna Schuleit Haber studied painting at the Rhode Island School of Design, creative writing/book arts at Dartmouth College, and was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard. Her works have ranged from museum installations made with paint, to large-scale projects in forests, on uninhabited islands, and in psychiatric institutions, using extensive sound systems, live sod, thousands of flowers, mirrors, antique telephones, bodies of water, and neuroscience technologies. She was named a MacArthur Fellow for work that has "conceptual clarity, compassion, and beauty."

Schuleit Haber has been a fellow at the MacDowell Colony, Bogliasco, Blue Mountain Center, The Hermitage, Yaddo, Banff, and a visiting artist/guest lecturer at Brown University, MIT, Smith College, Harvard's Graduate School of Design, The New School, Brandeis, University of Michigan, McGill, RISD, Boston University, Pratt, Bowdoin, and Syracuse University. Her writings have appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Believer*, the *Massachusetts Review*, *Agni*, and in *Urban Infill*, the journal of the Cleveland Urban Design Center. She was recently embedded in a small-town newsroom where she staged a serial 'take-over' of 26 front pages in collaboration with typographers from around the world, poets, writers, journalists, local citizens and students. Upcoming projects revolve around seriality and memory, and include commissions in the city of Copenhagen (DK) and other architectural settings in the U.S. Her works are included in private collections in the U.S., Europe, Asia, and Australia, as well as in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. She is based in New Orleans and New Hampshire.