

Elizabeth Xi Bauer presents: *Choir*

A duet exhibition with Abraham Kritzman and Daniel Silver

Curated by Maria do Carmo M. P. de Pontes

All the works that constitute this exhibition have autonomous existences. They could – as they probably have been in the past, and will possibly be in the future – be exhibited on their own, as single objects in a room, thus acquiring a totemic presence – or that of a soloist, to keep with the choir analogy. They could also – past, present or future – be exhibited in the dozens, establishing new dynamics through the orchestration of various voices. What is crucial is that they were conceived as individuals that belong to larger series, which is to say that they are embedded in a sense of community whilst having independent minds. They further share a sense of the gestural, as if they all told a story of presence, or encounter between the artist and the material that they used to produce them. The touch is there, carved in bronze, paper or paint, evidencing the artists' existences. But whereas Silver uses his hands to create humanoid figures, as of Victor Frankenstein, Kritzman's relationship with figuration is less obvious.

Misericord (2023) is a series of bronze works where Kritzman drew inspiration from misericords, also known as 'mercy seats', which are wood structures present in the front part of pews and made visible when such benches are folded. They are meant to offer some comfort during the standing periods of a prayer by allowing people to lean against them, thus functioning as small stools. To compose his series, Kritzman borrows the triangular shape with roundish edges from the original religious object but displays them way above a height that would make them functional. In tune with his *modus operandi* of interfering in a material again and again yet anew each time, the multiple patinas added to the surfaces result in unique, often nuanced shades.

TH (2023) the other series that Kritzman showcases in the context of *Choir*, gathers monochrome paintings made by an extremely thick layer of paint, which was then manipulated and moved around to create reliefs. Every single composition in this series is made by aligning two canvases, one on top of the other. These are then placed inside a large box made of black wood slabs that somehow allude to Modernist architecture, like a Scandinavian cottage's balcony placed vertically. The abstract surface of these works, reminiscent of a sea in revolt, is punctuated by subtle drawings that Kritzman carved while the painting was still wet. These are based on subjective memories, inspired by trips – to a Greek island, or a Dutch city – and what he felt, saw and experienced while there. Carving sensations, the artist seems interested in shaping the intangible.

Keeping with the symmetry, Daniel Silver contributes to this exhibition with two series as well. *Untitled* consists of large colourful heads, painted with watercolour and Japanese ink over paper during a family trip to California's Death Valley in 2021. Considering that they were executed at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, and that the eerily called mountainous valley, with its

exceedingly hot temperatures, is known for being inhospitable to human presence, one can assume that they are not portraits as such, but rather imagined faces. Indeed, Silver's compositions can be placed within portraiture only as far as we know what a human looks like, and can therefore identify the suggestion of traits. But his figures have an existence that elude the realm of representation. This same blurred line between figuration and abstraction is present in the painted busts on show, from the *Chorus* series: they have a torso, a neck and a head, and something that resembles facial features. Yet they don't seem to address a specific subject but the very idea of subjects, as if they addressed the human race in its totality: an all-encompassing representation. As curator Fiona Bradley beautifully described – albeit in relation to another series of busts, '...they don't actually look much like people. But we look at them and we can turn them from objects into people and back again nevertheless'¹. She goes further, to describe a 'sense that while the clay has been squeezed, moulded, fired and painted into this particular form, it could at any moment subside back into the earthly mass from which it came'². The evidence of the artist's existence would then become dust, or, at best, artefacts: an archeological dimension that is yet another point of touch between the practices of Silver and Kritzman.

Abraham Kritzman would like to thank Katrin Hanusch from the Foundry Make Touch, and Oliver Kilby from Squared Framing, for their dedication in helping to make the works in the exhibition.

¹ From the introductory essay of the catalogue of Silver's exhibition *Looking*, at the Fruitmarket Gallery, in Edinburgh, in 2022

² Ditto