

Althuis Hofland Fine Arts

Binds and Bonds

Katarina Janeckova Walshe

Opening 2 & 3 September

Althuis Hofland Fine Arts proudly presents the second solo exhibition in the gallery entitled "Binds and Bonds" by artist Katarina Janeckova Walshe (1988, Slovakia / lives and works in Corpus Christi, Texas). Within the works in the exhibition notions of freedom, bonds, and binds mingle, merge and separate. The artist plays with the blurring of liberty and constraint. Stylistically, there are tendencies but not limits...

On the occasion of the exhibition a booklet will be published with a text by Emily Farranto.

Ties that Bond

When you say a word over and over, the meaning of the word begins to dissolve. Say the word Freedom until you lose your grasp on what it means. Looking through this body of work by KJW, the word freedom is born and reborn in front of and within every canvas, freedom of, toward, and from. Freedom of expression, Freedom toward fantasy, Freedom from shame, Freedom to form bonds... Bonds. Say the word until it begins to dissolve. A bond is a connection made by adhesion, heat or pressure as opposed to a bind that is secured with ties.

Notions of freedom, bonds, and binds mingle, merge and separate within the paintings. KJW plays with the blurring of liberty and constraint. Stylistically, there are tendencies but not limits. The artist works on canvas or paper, fixed to the wall or on the ground or draped on a fence outdoors. Because the canvas is unstretched, the edges are vague, underdetermined, unconstrained, to be determined at a later time. The palette is not arbitrary; it favors warm colors, ochres, terra cottas, warm greens of the Texas landscape. But one also has the sense that the artist will grab a color, maybe a cool purple, on impulse, without restraint. Brushmarks vary in thick or thin paint, long fluid strokes or stuccato. These are figurative paintings that place no limits on what a figure can do, it can bend and contort comfortably, a woman can have six breasts. Why not, says the artist. In the country of our imagination we are free, completely and totally free under no governance. Why, in her paintings would the artist limit herself? Why would anyone? When you grow this sense of freedom in art it moves through you, through your work, into your life, and into the world.

Love and Bonds

Freedom is understood to mean without constraint. But freedom can exist within constraints. Within constraints freedom can find new depth, go deep rather than lateral. For example when we choose bonds of love and bonds of family, we give up some but not all freedom. A child, for example, is a living, breathing constraint on our liberty to do what we want when we want to do it. But a bond with a child shakes us profoundly, can redirect us to our own original, unconditional freedom that is part of our essential nature. In the painting of a mother and her children, the figures occupy all of the space within the frame.

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This spatial organization reflects the condition of motherhood, of family, cozy and claustrophobic. The picture frame contains and constrains them. Their bodies merge in the materiality of paint. These three figures, child, mother, and baby, are bound to each other while their faces express peace, a quiet joy.

The word bond can be posed in opposition of the word freedom. Bond, as in bondage, but also as in bonding. A bond can constrain or connect us. In these paintings the artist plays with the conceptual and linguistic overlap of binds and bonds, binds being that which ties us and bonds being that which connects us. There are several works in which ties, ropes, or lines bind the central figure. Some of the brushstrokes themselves look like tethers, ambivalent articulation of binds, brutally honest, brutally tender, admitting that the bonds that connect us can at times feel restrictive to the point of immobility, can feel not like bonds but binds. Most of these paintings remain on the domestic front, dealing with freedom and bonding within the familial context. A couple waded into wider waters of national and social experience.

The Space Between Stimulus and Response

Why is the notion of freedom so troubling to those in power? On the surface, the preoccupations of artists and poets seem benign. What threat to power is a poem about a woman or a painting of apples? The freedom to think, speak, act, and live freely, which is what artists do, is the greatest threat to power. But oppression does not always come from above; it can come from one's culture, one's fellow citizens. When does one person's interpretation of freedom constrict another person's? Why does one person's freedom trouble another? Two of KJW's paintings include the image of an American flag. In these paintings, the tension between freedom and that which constricts or constrains, alludes to the related concept of "rights." Unlike the words freedom and bonds, the word "rights" does not easily dissolve with repetition, it's mean more concrete. The flags, while painterly in articulation, do not merge with the more fluid language in the rest of these intensely personal paintings. As the feminist slogan goes, the personal is political. Viktor Frankl wrote,

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

For artists, freedom is inherent, it does not need to be rediscovered because it has been a fire that has burned within them all along. This is why artists pose a threat. In the space between stimulus and response there are artists and they share their constant fire, their inherent sense of freedom with those who have forgotten it.

A World Free of Shame

There was a time before shame but we have no memory of it. We come into the world shameless, at home in our bodies. In Eden too, Genesis 2:25, "The man and his wife were naked and they felt no shame." This was the first and divine state of humans according to the Christian narrative. It's notable that these two people, free of shame, were not children and were not solitary; they were a couple. According to psychologists, children do not feel shame until about three years old when a caregiver communicates (often unintentionally) that the child is not loveable, understandable, or in alignment with others.

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Can we imagine what it would be like to live in a space free from shame? As a child? As an adult? As a partner? These paintings propose a space in which there is freedom from shame, in which all are accepted and no one is cast out.

Letting Go

Painting is an act of letting go. Where drawing usually relies on the artist's control of the material, paint relies on the bold relinquishing of control. There is an idea that we try to control when we do not trust. A painter must trust herself, the process, and the material. She must stay close to that original fire and let it guide her instinctively. On the other side of control is not submission; it's freedom. The painter opens up the space between purpose and letting go, between freedom and bonds, between stimulus and response, and sets it ablaze.

Katarina Janeckova Walshe currently lives and works between Corpus Christi, Texas, and New York City. The artist has shown actively since 2010 and completed her master's at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava in 2013. Amongst her latest solo exhibitions were "Maternity Vacation", Gallery Sofie van de Velde, Antwerpen, Belgium; "Hingabe", Odyssey, Cologne, Germany (2022) and "Growing Season", Asia Art Centre, Taipei, Taiwan (2021) Group exhibitions include: "Apple in the dark", Harkawik, NY, USA (2022) and "Paint, Also Known As Blood", Museum of Modern Art, Warschau, Polen (2019)