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Serendipity

Lucien Murat & Sebastian Helling

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Amidst turbulent chaos can unexpected hidden order be found? Can destructive and desolate crisis give birth to creation? In *Serendipity*, new works by Lucien Murat and Sebastian Helling dare audiences to not only find order in utter disarray, but to accept the possibility of there being positive, even joyful meaning beyond the uncertainty and anxiety.

Just as the serendipitous mind instinctively finds happy accidents within the seemingly chaotic, this new show reframes the notion of discovery in disorder and the process of succumbing to what is.

But what if that chaos is too much to confront? When fear and apprehension of impending global catastrophe is beyond Lucien Murat's own imagination, he delegates that burden to AI. The resulting physical translations present viewers with a fateful glimpse of our future, one the human conscience is not capable of originating. As Murat questions the grandiose of chaos, could it be there is beauty and joy hidden within the fear?

The serendipity-mindset concept of serenity co-existing with chaos is explored further by Sebastian Helling. Succumbing to his own immense force of energy and submerging himself with the canvas, his artworks are a beautifully chaotic aftermath, revealing unexpectedly recognisable humanlike forms and biomorphic shapes.

Both artists show, in two deeply different ways how when faced with tumultuous forces, resistance is futile. *Serendipity* calls instead for surrender. Maybe only by releasing control can we tune into a deeper, more resonant connection with the patterns of nature's enduring cycle, honing our unconscious ability to turn the unexpected into the fortuitous.

— Daniel Sundin —

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Lucien Murat



Lucien Murat (born 1986 Ploemeur) is a Paris based artist who is a graduate from Central Saint Martins in London.

Using a technique of sewn patches, textures and found tapestries he has brought to life a personal mythology allowing him to question and explore the post Internet world. In this new body of works he interrogates the relationship between human beings and nature and especially the dereliction of a living environment where humanity could thrive.

In close partnership with an AI scientist, Victor Rambaud, they have engineered an AI, which once fed and trained with a cluster of textures found in Murat's previous works, is capable of creating a textured variation of any image or picture of nature given to the program. The AI generate images of a derelict nature that looks petrified and powder like, where any trace of life has vanished.

Murat's work offers the viewer an uneasy glance in to a dystopic near future where the impact of human activities have modified the climate and the ecosystems, endangering our very existence. Murat confronts the viewer with an undeniable truth of a dying world.

Murat has been widely exhibited in France in both solo and group exhibitions, including in institutions such as CAC Meymac, FRAC Bordeaux, Musée de Soissons, MIAM, Musée de Rochechouart amongst many others. He has also been exhibited internationally in the US, Germany, Belgium and Italy.

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Lucien Murat



Lucien Murat (b. 1986) had previously accustomed viewers with truncated, tapestry-like in their meticulousness, constructions evoking imageries of violence or war. Throughout this new series of works, the French artist puts forward the act of painting itself, a reflection carried through a questioning of how artificial intelligence might perceive humanity's ill treatment of the planet and environment.

Visually, the materialistic works on view might not immediately give way to their underlying meaning. Their creation process is anchored within a recurring starting point that has guided Murat for several years: questioning the translation of a digital subject into analogue format or how to depict computer-generated images, in this instance, into a painterly language. Resulting paintings are dense, thickly layered in somewhat garish colours, oscillating between the realms of reality and science fiction. The artist looks to shine light onto a hidden world, that one's mind cannot fully comprehend due to its innate psychological protection.

Murat's process of creation is multi-layered and multimedia: besides painting, he consistently employs stitching and sewing of various textiles, and has more recently started accumulating found materials, repurposed as backgrounds within present paintings. The latter create unexpected, magma-like surfaces that both fix and unsettle the viewer's eye through their vivacity, or deliberate dullness.

Conceptually, Murat questions the very act of painting, especially as a landscape or reflection of our time: not only saturated with images, but in which nature fares poorly. Simultaneously, he employs artificial intelligence, which endlessly captivates and fascinates the artist, as an attempt of regaining authenticity.

If the narration and story open themselves, in this new series of paintings and drawings, to more texturization of materials and abstraction, they cannot conceal a form of virulence and impetuosity. Perhaps even a kind of anger or dull, silent fury, like this nature that we often destroy without a sound. Murat admits to favouring literature over art, particularly that of William Faulkner. Like the American writer, might Murat be positioning himself against a certain injustice and, without providing miracle solutions, bear witness to harsh realities that haunt us?

Historically and particularly throughout French history of art, one notices that such rough surfaces and materials resonate in times of war and post-war... Names as Jean Fautrier or Jean Dubuffet immediately resonate, as their oeuvre evoke without ever explicitly naming the horrors of the past, while calling into question the traditional values of painting as a medium. It is in this spirit that Murat finds himself, in the spirit of his great predecessors, who during times of unrest, called for the necessity of a new type of painting - "stronger, without aftertaste, more authentic", as Daniel Abadie defined it in the exhibition catalogue of Center Pompidou's exhibition titled *Paris-Paris*.

Fleeing overly coded, identical, stereotypical, even kitsch creations, Murat refers to the Czech-French novelist Milan Kundera (1929-2023), and his denouncement of the notion of embellishment of lies. As such, is Murat striving to show what the viewer refuses to see? Or, even further, to confront one with an imminent reality that is made attractive through its pictorial depiction? With these open questions in mind, the works on view appear at the intersection of a digital contribution which would guide us, despite its artificial side, towards a type of prophecy. In the end, the question of "What do we choose to believe?" is the overarching subject of these artworks, and perhaps of Murat's entire oeuvre.

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Sebastian Helling

Born in London in 1975, Oslo-based Sebastian Helling received his BA from the London College of Printing in 2001 and went on to receive an MFA from the Royal College of Art two years later. In 2011 he received an MA from Statens Kunstakademi in Oslo.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Did You See Me*, Kristiansund Kunsthall (2022), *Too early, You know ?*, Buer Gallery, Oslo (2021), *Godspeed, For Pete Sake*, TW Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (2020), *My House*, Plum Trim, Nesodden (2020), *Then Play On*, TW Gallery, Australia (2018), *Us/ Them*, QB Gallery and Blomqvist, Oslo (2018), VOLTA NY, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, New York (2017), amongst many more.

He has exhibited in group shows as far and wide as Norway, Sweden, Poland, the UK, Germany, Australia and USA, including Breach Gallery, Miami (2021), pt.2 Gallery, Oakland (2020), Grafforists, Torrance Art Museum, Los Angeles (2016) and many more. Helling's work is represented in several collections around the world.

Helling lives and works in Oslo, Norway.



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Sebastian Helling



An energy of liberation runs through modern painting. Initially, and perhaps most strikingly, it is evident in the freeing of colour and form from the labour of representation. Once begun this liberatory process doesn't stop, however, and eventually it hits the integrity of the medium itself, dissolving its defining characteristics. Observed through a 'thermodynamic' lense, the evolutionary arch of modern painting can be seen as the medium's struggle to survive as an identifiable unity while adapting to the emancipatory and uprooting repercussions of industrial modernity.

As a result, painting's internal coherence, the givenness of its material composition and craft, is exchanged for external (mainly economic) pressures as means to hold it together as a recognisable thing. Turned fluid and aimless, painting in modernity begs containment, not by tube, canvas, and *métier*, but by recipient structures like discourse, gallery, museum, fair, and collection. In other words, its strategies are increasingly attuned to relations that reward the immediacy of gesture over careful depiction. The drive towards abstraction in modernist painting is then not principally a symptom of rarification – i.e. painting withdrawing from a broader public sphere – but, ultimately, an optimisation of aesthetic efficiency and reach.

Fast forward a hundred-plus years: In Sebastian Helling's paintings a restless pursuit of visual hooks is front and centre; read through its quick, often impasto and sloppy facture his work is emphatically not about contemplation but completion, about moving through and on, to the next, and the next. There are marks of frustration and hesitance to be found, for sure, surfaces worked and reworked to the point of oversaturation, thick lines in fatty oils that whimsically trace dissolving figures, seeking a closure that never fully arrives, then layered over with semi-transparent fields as if to erase or rewind, and try again. In short, Helling's canvases are packed with manual effort.

Still, any doubt or pause they attest to is inextricably tied to painting as a physical act. Whatever impedes the process, it is imperative that it is solved on canvas, in the act, and not through consideration at a remove. Helling thinks painting in and through its constitutive matter, which means that it isn't actually only he who thinks but a cooperative endeavour – and, importantly, one in which painter, in a sense, is subservient to the medium. A strange transfer of agency takes place if we accept this reversal; it admits that painting knows best what needs to be done. The painter-subject is dissolved in the productive flows of a visual culture marked by ever-shrinking transaction times, where decision-making is indistinguishable from simple reflex.

Helling's generously, sometimes ridiculously, sized acronymic signature answers a call for volume and impact. Its proportions mock pretensions of authorship while capitalising on the value-creating potential of artist name in an economy where brand and image are interchangeable. Using Helling as vessel, painting paints its escape from the constraints of the archaic framings of intention and originator, while at the same time exploiting the commercial appeal of these vestiges. This cues us to the possible meaning of the cartoonish skulls and disembodied, empty stares that populate Helling's paintings: They signify the artist as hollowed-out vessel.

The painter has become a mere means for painting to make more of itself, a surrogate womb spitting out endless reams of painting-babies. In fact, baby is a fitting metaphor for what takes place on canvas too. The undeniable cuteness of Helling's images, that is their ability to elicit attachments on first view, is emblematic of contemporary painting's self-reproduction scheme, how it attracts resources: Helling's canvases are unedited recordings of a search for visual immediacy on the behest of a medium that refuses to slip into redundancy, to uncover and mobilise the surface effects that best accomplish the memetic success needed to perpetuate it in a world where all power is, eventually, ceded to the commodity.