

BAERT GALLERY 1923 S SANTA FE AVENUE LOS ANGELES CA 90021
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FRANCESCA MOLLETT

Spiral Walking

May 7 – June 18, 2022

*'The same sound splays the sound waves into a polyvalence, a rose.
A bloom is not a parade.'*

– Fanny Howe, Night Philosophy

Baert Gallery is pleased to present a new body of work by London-based artist Francesca Mollett, in her first solo exhibition at the gallery.

In these large-scale oil paintings, Mollett explores the liquidity and effervescence of the medium and the correspondence these qualities have with environmental, emotional and perceptual states. Inviting a slow, attentive contemplation, the paintings unfold as the eye wanders and attunes to their rhythms and dissonances: forms hover on the cusp of recognition, travel paths open, time slows and rushes in the slip and stumble.

The title of the exhibition comes from Fanny Howe's essay 'Bewilderment' – a text Mollett felt an affinity with as she made these works. Using spiral as both image and movement, Howe conceives of bewilderment as an uncertain, responsive state emerging between environment and interiority, "an enchantment that follows a complete collapse of reference."¹ Mollett finds a synchronicity between Howe's figure of the spiral walker, for whom time is 'warped and refractive', and an orientation to space that opens up unusual perceptive abilities and sensitivities. Grappling with storytelling, material and abstraction, Mollett explores bewilderment as a way of navigating between thoughts and images, the cyclical movement itself speaking of painting as a desire for returning to and inhabiting questions.

Responding to the fissured, tunnelled terrains of watery and subterranean landscapes, the paintings take on fractural structures in their construction of sensation and memory, recalling and newness. As the layered space of each painting develops, strange qualities and relationships of light, colour and texture emerge that draw out and heighten a sense of original experiential impact. Passages of paint signal transitions, routes and returns: a crest, a hollow, a trickle, a tremor, an echo – establishing a pattern of difference and continuity, bearing and lostness. Manifestations of liquid and mineral interactions can be felt in the paint's deposits, crusts, rifts and blisters.

In 'Hands of Steam', effects of steamininess in the paint flatten and disturb the surface, creating a just-out-of-reach-ness, a grasping, groping feeling of moving semi-blindly within. The dancing closeness and inscrutability of the dissolve and reveal, the ripple and reflection, absorbs the viewer. The feeling of having slipped from a stable, familiar position is more acute perhaps in 'Coils (from a night passage)', where a velvety undergrowth seems to flicker with flight lines and dust trails, and the viewer becomes drawn like a moth to the pockets of light and depths of the darkness.

Towards the centre of many of the paintings there is a clearing, an openness – drawing inwards and breathing out. A strange fluorescence emanates from the square portal-like source in 'Mary of the Well'. Seen as though through a tangled pathway, its shape is mirrored above and below, creating a dual passage through the painting and a sense of alignment – of having arrived at a viewpoint waiting to be reached.

Made over a long period of time, the painting 'Arena' became itself an ongoing generative source for the body of work as a whole. Beginning in a state of openness, without overt references, it cultivated questions: how to create lightness that isn't absence; how much to bring together and how much to let free; how to connect to passing time; how to hold space; how to keep air from floating away. Like a fire, a field, it contains cycles of failure and growth, traces of previous states. Sanded areas create hazy, softened versions of blazing textures elsewhere. Every area of the painting has been tended – brought

¹ Fanny Howe, Night Philosophy, 2020, p 106.

forward and knocked back. There is a liveness, a sense that stillness cannot be held. It moves, you move – in continuation, with ruptures.

Francesca Mollett was born in Bristol, UK in 1991. She graduated with an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art, London in 2020, and previously studied at The Royal Drawing School (2015) and Wimbledon College of Arts (2014) and is the recipient of the Aidan Threlfall Award (2020). Recent exhibitions include *An Ode to Orlando*, curated by Marcelle Joseph at Pi Artworks, London, UK (2022); *Down in Albion* at L.U.P.O., Lorenzelli Projects, Milan, Italy (2021); *Le coeur encore* at The Approach, London, UK (2021); *Wild Shade* at Informality Gallery, Henley-on-Thames, UK (2021); *Diaries of a Climate* at Baert Gallery, Los Angeles, USA (2021) and *London Grads Now*, at Saatchi Gallery, London, UK.