

GREENE NAFTALI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monika Baer *loose change*

April 28 – June 26, 2021
Ground Floor

Monika Baer has spent three decades inventing forms to convey the inner workings of her chosen medium, bringing painting's disparate visual traditions into productive conflict. Her second solo exhibition at Greene Naftali features two new groups of paintings and works on paper, alternating between styles and techniques—often within a single work. Trompe l'oeil matchsticks, illusionistic tree bark, mineral deposits and scattered coins: her combination of these rendered and actual elements lays competing claims to painterly realism, yielding what she calls "a clash of logics, through which the medium itself is activated and performed."

A cycle of five large-format paintings depict what appear to be listing tree trunks, partially framed by masonry walls that fill the bottom edge of each canvas. Painted bark peels back in strips until it falls away entirely, exposing the raw, pinkish stalk beneath those protective layers. Made between 2019-21, the series stages a drama of gradual shedding against lush backdrops of powder blue; a sketch of a face drifts across one extravagant sky, a three-dimensional teardrop is attached to another. These disruptors keep the paintings' elements analytically distinct, preventing the works from cohering into the landscapes they might otherwise pass for.

The stone wall that spans the paintings' lower registers evokes the shallow space of a theatrical set, grounding the works by providing a marker of vertical orientation. Yet that fictive sense of anchorage is upended in Baer's paintings that incorporate matchsticks, which are set loose within atmospheric fields of pigment, defying gravity. Some matchsticks hover and others fly, projectile-like: angled inward toward the canvas's depths or pointed out, taking aim at the viewer. Small but menacing objects recur in works on paper which feature fragments of rotary saw blades, strewn among otherwise benign smudges of watercolor, like the daubs on a painter's palette. The exhibition's title, *loose change*, may also refer to the stray coins that dot the surfaces of several sheets, and reflects Baer's deeper interest in the metaphors of hard currency: the material guises through which value circulates, changing hands and shifting form. From matches to timber to legal tender, nature to culture to cultural capital—Baer toys with our desire to draw connections between her chosen motifs, only to obstruct the readings that stem from these signifying chains. The specificity of her eye and brush galvanizes common things, allowing them to become actors in a swirling, materialist narrative of liquidity and constant flux.

Monika Baer lives and works in Berlin. An upcoming solo exhibition will open at the Kunsthalle Bern this fall. She has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (2020); Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany (2019); Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany, which traveled to Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, Germany (both 2016); Greene Naftali, New York (2015); and Art Institute of Chicago (2013), which traveled to Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts (2014). Her work has been featured in recent group exhibitions at Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2019); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2019); mumok, Vienna (2018); WIELS, Brussels (2017); and Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2013); among others. Her work is in the collections of the The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum Brandhorst, Munich; Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany; University of Chicago Booth School of Business, Chicago; and Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts; among others.