

GREENE NAFTALI

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Monika Baer *Schweine Steine Scherben*

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8th Floor

Greene Naftali is announcing its third solo exhibition with German artist Monika Baer, whose disarming subversions of her chosen medium have made her one of the most challenging painters working today. The exhibition features a new suite of paintings that inhabit tropes of modernism—from the monochrome to the graffiti-like scrawls that connote raw impulse and unfettered energy. Tempering her consummate technical skill with a streak of gleeful regression, these latest works recast what Baer calls her career-long project to “vulgarize the high-artness of painting.”

Here trompe l’oeil brick walls are largely covered (or subsumed) by textured zones of spackled grit, a kind of painterly stucco that seems poised to overtake the picture plane. These nebulous fields are incised with crude outlines that read as accumulations of anonymous marks. Illicit and primal, graffiti has long been a touchstone for the avant-garde, from ancient petroglyphs to Jean Dubuffet to Brassai’s gouged Parisian walls. Baer’s own roster of drawings skews comically dire, by turns antic and foreboding: cloven hooves, a Jesus-type who rolls his eyes, a hairy ass that wears a crown. Baer’s vignettes feel offhand and ribald and raunchy but scratch at deeper truths—as if to satirize the era with their own perversions and gallows humor.

The paintings share an ethereal shade of purple at odds with their coarser contents, made from brown and violet pigments applied in thin washes that settle into every ridge and furrow. Baer chose the color for its sheer beauty and “unserious” bent—it lacks art-historical pedigree—with a certain glamour and inklings of queerness (lavender menace, lavender marriage). Her faux-stuccoed walls reveal nothing but more wall behind them, refusing to serve as portals to escape the present. For the artist, this relentless frontality “insists on painterly activity within the rectangle, rather than pointing to any solution beyond it.” Layering both illusionistic and brute indexical marks, profane motifs and delicate hues, Baer stages painting as a receptive surface for the obscenities of our times.

Monika Baer currently lives and works in the Black Forest. A key figure in postwar German painting, Baer has been the subject of solo museum exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago and Kunsthalle Bern, as well as at the Museum Bonn, Museum Abteiberg, and Kestner Gesellschaft in Germany, and at the Williams College Museum of Art in Massachusetts. Recent solo exhibitions include Trautwein Herleth, Berlin (2023); Greene Naftali, New York (2021, 2015); and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (2020). Baer received Berlin’s Hannah Höch Prize for lifetime achievement in 2019.

Her work was recently acquired by The Museum of Modern (MoMA), New York, and is held in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum Brandhorst, Munich; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, among others.