

Servane Mary @ 89 Greene

June 18 - July 30, 2022

89 Greene at signs and symbols* is pleased to present Servane Mary, a French born, NY-based artist whose work is invested in the appropriation of found imagery and more recently, process-based abstraction. The artist moves easily between mediums — from photography and sculpture to painting and installation — yet remains consistent in her message. Her practice examines the complexities of female power as well as the representation of women in our society and uses a wide array of materials to convey her ideas. Mary's exhibition is organized by 89 Greene curator Dr. Kathy Battista.

Untitled (10,27) (2013) is a diptych comprised of two small inkjet prints on mylar. Mary printed archival imagery of women working in factories during the Second World War on silver and gold rescue blankets; the folds of the blanket as well as the striation of lines from the printer are evidenced on the surface, creating a ghostlike effect within the image. In addition to the obfuscation of the imagery through the printing process, the women in the photographs are not the actual workers, but models wearing feminine dresses and sporting makeup and manicures, creating a further removal from the original subject matter. From runners who complete marathons to refugees and disaster relief, these blankets serve a wide array of purposes. Mary's use of the foil blankets is representative of the role of women in international crises and is part of her abiding interest in how imagery of women was used and understood in the mid to late twentieth century, as well as her ongoing investigation into mass-market materials. This small diptych is from a series of larger works that was previously exhibited at Triple V gallery in Paris.

John Miller described Mary's use of imagery and material in her work in his essay, "The Black Box:" Mary courts an even more rarefied tension because the "thing-in-itself" in her work, the material substrate, is so often synthetic. Thus, its presence can seem provisional. If synthetic materials necessarily result from historical experimentation and invention, their juxtaposition with images of women in Mary's work reminds us that the familiar paradigms of femininity are constructions, ones that are not necessarily inevitable.

In Themselves (3) (2022) is an abstract work created in acrylic, spray paint and silkscreen ink on laminated pegboard. This new work is a sample from Mary's latest series, which are abstract compositions created in her large South Bronx studio. As in former series on industrial materials, the artist uses a mass-produced item as substrate. The peg boards found in any local hardware store become her canvas as well as stencils. She creates this work by pouring paint onto a pegboard, which then drips through the holes in its surface, a process that is repeated several times. In Themselves (3) is a nod to her earlier printing processes, with its use of CMYK colors that are layered to create an almost textile-like effect. The central section of the work resembles large brush strokes, an ironic nod to the history with which the artist is engaging. True to her earlier practice, Mary remains engaged with the legacy of image making and women's role within that as both subject and creator.

*Please note that all 89 Greene exhibitions are on view at the gallery's location at 249 East Houston Street; the name of the project is only in reference to Jack Smith's historic address.