

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Jéronimo Rüedi: *Preaesns*

October 2025

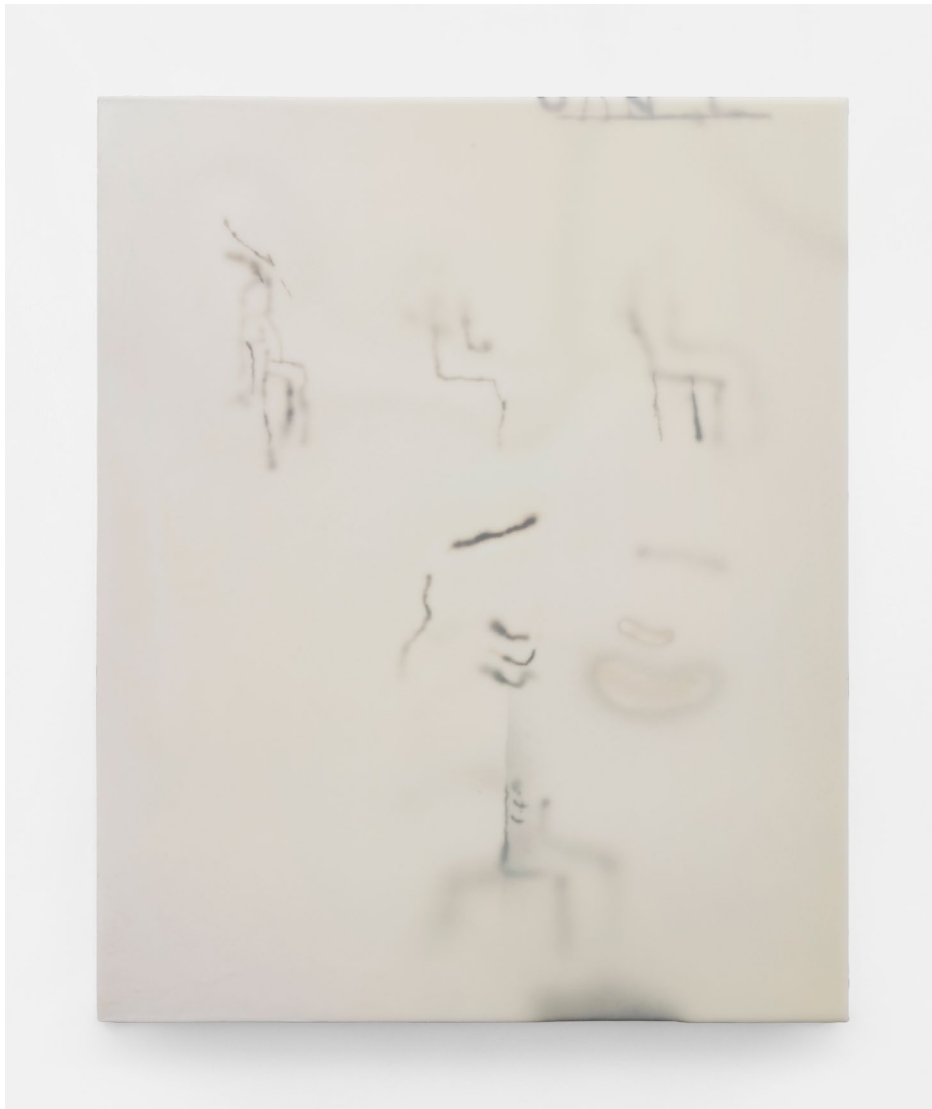
by Natalie Ginsberg



Installation view: Jérónimo Rüedi: *Preaesns*, Bureau, New York, 2025. Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York.

Like the exhibition's name, *Preaesns*, most of the painting titles in Jérónimo Rüedi's show at Bureau are made up of nonce language. Their letterform clusters flirt with semantic meaning—my computer, for instance, corrects *Oirgn 01* (2025) to “Origin 01,” convinced it has detected a lexical trace—but they ultimately lie beyond it. There is a painting, however, whose title communicates rhetorical meaning in English to pose a centuries-old philosophical question: *Why is there something rather than nothing* (2024)?

For Rüedi, whose airbrushed marks hover in vacuous atmospheres, this inquiry strikes at the heart of his practice, in which he clears the space of the canvas so that something might appear. The painting's titular question—why is there something rather than nothing?—also resonates with an additive material shift in several other works: the artist's introduction of encaustic, a more-than-two-millennia-old painting technique of applying heated wax medium and pigment to a surface. Given the material's history in devotional image-making, the wax in Rüedi's encaustic paintings can be read as a kind of “liturgical flesh.”¹ Though these works omit the religious doctrine of a wax effigy in a reliquary display, they too create a haptic opportunity for deepened reflection and seeing anew. They epitomize Rüedi's interests in ritual and spiritual history, channeling a meditative artistic process that seeks to move beyond his own intention and surrender to greater forces—a practice not unlike faith.



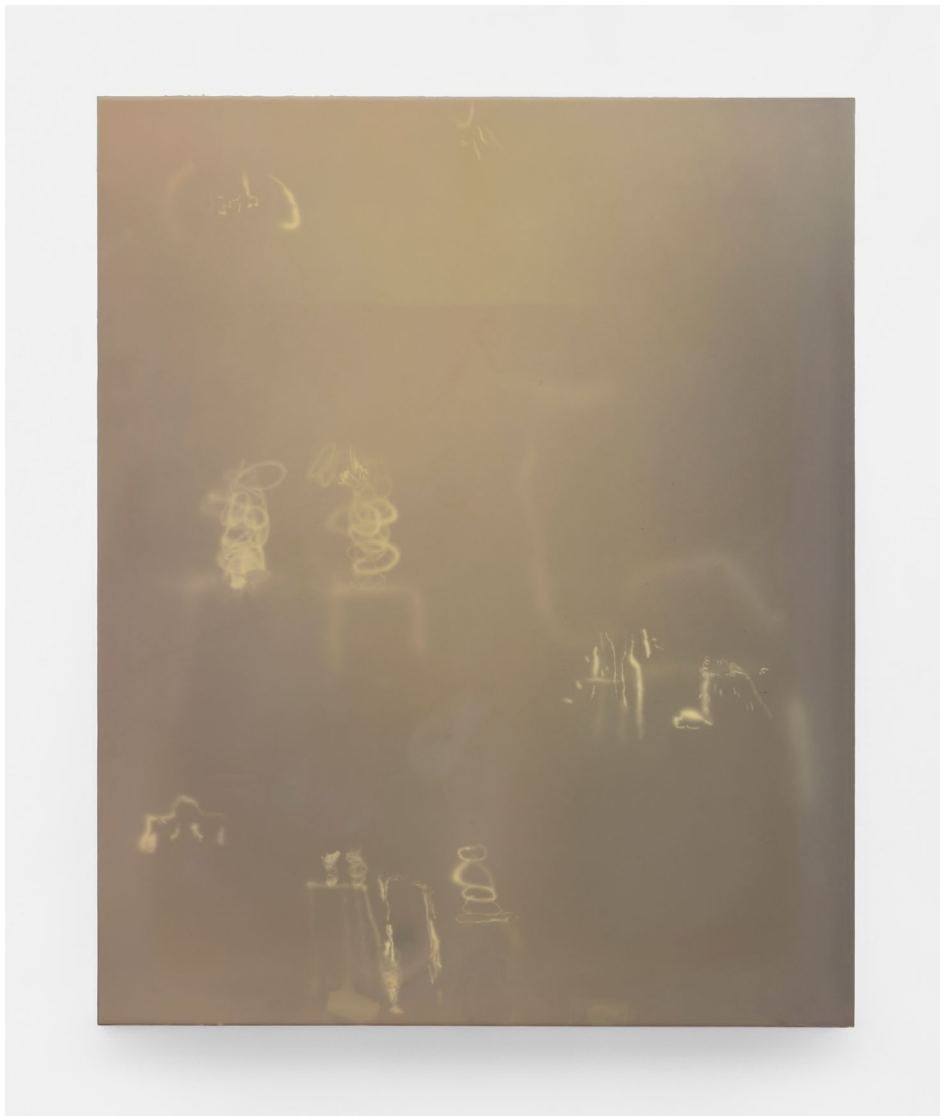
Jerónimo Rüedi, *Oirgn 01*, 2025. Encaustic on aluminum mounted to wood, 23 7/8 × 19 7/8 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York.

Rüedi's turn to wax is informed by his longstanding desire to contend with the noisy, woven textures of his canvases that, to his frustration, continually announced themselves as surface. But years before introducing encaustic, Rüedi was already experimenting with subtraction as a solution in his acrylic paintings: first removing gestural brushstrokes, then color, and finally muting the cloth field itself. Over time, he discovered that by repeatedly layering thin coats of pigment and resin, he could muffle the canvas's noise, producing the empty yet charged void he sought. In *Aulcinnation* (2025), for example, Rüedi renders the surface intangible, accumulating layers of acrylic paint until they register as interior. From flatness, and without the use of perspective, Rüedi constructs depth, volume, an environment. Like the iPhone screen whose glass surface vanishes in use to produce a totally consuming virtual experience, Rüedi's paintings offer an absorptive encounter, though the artist's "screens" induce contemplative dwelling as opposed to scrolling restlessly by. The result is a seemingly endless interiority, one that invites viewers to enter, inhabit the vastness of the painting, and roam.

Out of this depth, Rüedi's marks emerge like phosphenes—the shapes, colors, and light spots that appear behind closed eyelids without visual stimuli. The marks enter the illuminated field of perception in waves, fugitive. Suspended somewhere between near and far, their beginnings are impossible to locate. Rüedi has, mesmerizingly, “de-originate[d] the utterance.”²

Preparing the field in this way so that a mark might appear, Rüedi's paintings visually and conceptually embody Martin Heidegger's notion of the clearing (*Lichtung*, in German), which understands openings as sites through which entities can emerge from obscurity. Leaning into the intentionally unintentional, Rüedi treats each canvas as a tabula rasa and seeks to suspend any preconceived ambition, thought, or emotion, allowing the preconscious to take form. Through this double clearing—of the canvas and the self—Rüedi opens both the physical sensation of space and the psychic conditions for his marks to reveal themselves. These are not color fields, after all.

He has said of this process, "I watch a shape come in and let it drop." Viewers standing before one of his paintings experience a similarly observational encounter. The marks seem to be appearing in real time from their ambient environment, animated by the variable densities, thicknesses, and opacities of Rüedi's line. Smoke signals, skywriting, traces of light in a long camera exposure, messages begin to come through, although it remains unclear exactly how they appeared and how long they might stay. Perhaps they are already leaving.



Jerónimo Rüedi, *Whgos Theroy*, 2025. Encaustic on aluminum mounted to wood, 47 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 39 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York.

Comparing images of Rüedi's acrylic and encaustic paintings—*Airady Afrmah* (2025) and *Oirgn 01*, for example—they may not seem to be doing radically different things (a testament to the artist's ability to build a surface-less surface with acrylic alone). But experiencing the works in the gallery, the wax paintings impart an entirely distinct feeling: a sense of space that you can sink, rather than fall, into, and a presence deepened by an understanding of process and historical weight. While in the acrylic paintings, Rüedi slowly builds up paint layers to create their spatial environment, in the encaustic paintings, he swiftly pours a mixture of beeswax, resin, and pigment over his airbrushed marks to give the works their color and depth. This organic veil, applied in a final gesture that records the painting in its moment of becoming, both introduces an element of chance—the unknowability of the wax's eventual hue, transparency, and effect before cooling—and connects Rüedi's encaustic paintings to a long history of image-making with wax across religious, scientific, commemorative, and artistic contexts.

In *Whgos Theroy* (2025) especially, the specific capacities of wax become remarkably clear. Wax's plasticity—its ability to move, warm, resemble, and be inscribed—imbues it with an anthropomorphic quality, as though it were flesh.³ For Rüedi's abstract visual language, the introduction of flesh is transformative: it lends a tactility that provokes the desire for touch, a fragility and heat sensitivity that evoke corporeal being, and a discernible thickness, something like skin, that offers the sensation of intimacy amid spaciousness. The wax's palpable tenderness and density also slows perception itself, giving *Whgos Theroy*'s depth a temporality distinct from the gallery in which it hangs. We can still enter the work, but not as if through open air. Against and inside the newly viscous atmosphere, motion slows, time stretches.

Most meaningfully, however, wax converts the painting into a kind of votive object, an *ex-voto* [of a vow] to that unsteady position Rüedi maintains in his paintings between coming and going, presence and absence, content and clearing. Yet in *Whgos Theroy*, rather than serving as material for a mimetic holy figure or a candle burned in mass, wax consecrates the field of rumination itself, the “indistinct breath of the image” that rises like vapor from the painting's scrawls on the left and like whispers from behind.⁴ As much as we contemplate Rüedi's *wax poetics*, his paintings retain their sense of mystery, a transient presence that—however subtly—leans unmistakably toward something, rather than nothing.

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, “Wax Flesh, Vicious Circles,” in *Encyclopaedia Anatomica: A Complete Collection of Anatomical Waxes*, ed. Monika von Düring, Marta Poggesi, and Georges Didi-Huberman (New York: Taschen, 1999), 70.

2. This quotation comes from Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (originally published in 1970), his reading of Honoré de Balzac's 1831 short story *Sarrasine*. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 21.

3. Didi-Huberman, “Wax Flesh, Vicious Circles,” 65.

4. *Ibid.*, 74.