

Visions From the Personal Growth Laboratory

Erica Mahinay
Lyles & King, NY
3 May - 5 June 2017

Percept language is a way of rephrasing language to take ownership of individual experience. If language creates reality, then it should reflect the awareness of the self, by foregoing impersonal pronouns—"it," "that"—as a way of restructuring the brain to create fluidity in the way we fashion ideas of ourselves. Percept is an idea in psychology first developed by John and Joyce Weir as part of the Human potential movement, whose philosophy informs the body of work on view. The Weirs' work is an experiment in perception of the self, and as an experiment in perception, it is visual.

Erica Mahinay researches this philosophy first hand through attending "Labs" conducted by current practitioners of the Weir's work, Jake and Hannah Eagle. Personal Growth becomes a key with which to look at the works on view. To break away from the idea of gesture as markmaking or the desire to leave an individual stamp, but rather, see that each piece is a journey to create a whole out of parts, a process of negotiation through material. The result is evident in the way imperfections are integrated into the work. The word "seamlessly" keeps coming to mind: how its association is always positive: "without obvious joints," reads the dictionary, when really, the joints are the stuff of life. The still life paintings where flowers take up only a side or a corner and the wooden supports that remain visible through thin fabrics or lack thereof, emphasize how a canvas is an architecture, a door, a window, a way in.

Viewing Mahinay's paintings means taking note: there are stitches across the different planes, the details sewn in. Two or more materials come together, a collage that is doing double duty, both the subject and the surface, both image and support. Viewing means parceling out the details, too: two black canvases with yellow flowers almost come together to form one springtime-lilies-subject (also an art historical theme), one black-on-black abstract. In one the flowers take up the top left corner, in another the hint of a vase in the bottom. They're made of the same materials, twinned by process, then by image.

The word "detail" has a sense beyond that of a small part of a larger sum. "Detail" in its military sense stands both for a group and a single task. Possibly at the same time: detail as a verb and a body. An act and a presence. In images from Mahinay's studio, the paintings sit on stilts against the black floor. They seem fragile, almost imbalanced, but always claiming presence against the wall, the floor, the idea of something—the canvas itself, the work—being smoothly complete rather than carrying the signs of work, of conjoining, of a single task made up of many.

Mahinay calls the paintings Thin Skins. It pulls the works out of the realm of the image and into the physical. The fragility is still there, though. The fear of being overstretched.

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Essay by Orit Gat

