

## **A Grammar of Gestures**

Exhibition at Kourd Gallery, Athens

**Maria Capelo, Mark Lammert, Michael Markwick, Béatrice Dreux, David Benforado**

Opening 23 November 2021

Exhibition dates : 23.11.2021 – 20.02.2022

Curated : by Jurriaan Benschop

The painters in this exhibition understand their work as a practice of transformation. Human figures, animals, or elements of landscape appear in their works, but these motifs present themselves neither in a singular, unambiguous way, nor as a hard subject matter. Rather, the center of attention is on the dynamics of shapes, on the ability of forms to flip and change appearance while you are looking at them. This shifting has to do with the way the motifs are executed, with the grammar of painterly gestures that is involved in the conception of the works. Each of the painters presents a distinct sensibility, a way to approach the canvas, paper, or other substrate. There is a gentle or decisive brushstroke, an angry scraping away, or a patient process of layering paint to reach a certain depth or intensity of color. The paintings develop their character and complexity in their material presence, through touch and texture.

It is the hand that speaks in the drawings called *Corgo* by Lisbon-based artist **Maria Capelo**. The work is a response to an existing landscape image, but equally the result of following a physical movement and relying on the memory of the hand while drawing. In Portuguese, *corgo* means a narrow path between hills. The Serra do Caldeirão in the south of Portugal embodies for Capelo a primeval landscape, a standard in her understanding of nature. From there she developed her interest in and knowledge of other landscapes in Europe, considering them as portraits of the earth, containing information about culture and changes. Capelo was recently featured in the exhibition *All I Want, Portuguese Women Artists from 1900 to 2020* at the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon. In 2018 the Municipal Galleries of Lisbon presented her solo exhibition *The Things of the World are Rock*.

In his series *After Etienne-Jules Marey II*, Berlin-based artist **Mark Lammert** explores the human figure in movement. While Marey studied movement as a scientist and chronophotographer, Lammert does this as a painter, working with layers of color in a static image, and with lines indicating a human appearance. The figuration is discreet, a hint rather than a portrait. The works seem to focus on activity and posture, showing standing, leaning, proceeding, sitting, or balancing. The red, painted surface is framed by a checkered pattern of fine lines, bringing a different sense of measure and context. Lammert has participated in several major exhibitions, such as *Travelling the World. Artworks from the ifa Collection, 1949 to the Present* in Moscow in 2013. His set design for the play *The Persians* was staged in Epidaurus in 2009. His most recent solo exhibition was at the Leonhardi Museum in Dresden in 2020-21.

The work of **Michael Markwick** is usually related to nature, though not always in an explicit way. The energy of nature comes to us in gestural and lyrical abstraction, with more or less direct indications of a landscape, sometimes with a figure, too. The complexity of forms allows multiple interpretations of the painted motifs. In *Flood* and *Dusk*, there is a hazy light that attracts the attention first, presenting an environment where something is “in the air,” a moment of the day rather than a specific location. The use of transparent silk supports a gentle sensibility, whereas in earlier works, a rougher and edgier kind of abstraction predominated. The artist grew up in Michigan, USA, at the fringes of a city, in a setting where nature collides with human intervention. In his work, a dark outlook on the environmental situation of the world meets a poetic potential for hopeful transformation. Markwick had his first institutional solo show in Germany in 2018 at the Martin von Wagner Museum in Würzburg. In 2020 he participated in *Exhibitionisms* at the artist-run network Tiger Strikes Asteroid, in Chicago.

Vienna-based artist **Béatrice Dreux** uses simple motifs like a moon, a cloud, or a rainbow, and from there, she develops the forms in a process of layering and detailed surface treatment until they gain an inner strength. For Dreux painting is a language in itself. When she paints, she is not aiming to tell a story, or make some statement about subject matter. Instead it is about texture, gesture, color, and form, and how these elements together on the canvas speak to us directly. The rainbow transforms and can appear as a door or portal, or as something else that breathes and has a life of its own. The motifs are executed in monumental series that combine an interest in spirituality and ancient wisdom with a contemporary, colorful expression. The French-born artist has been in Austria since childhood, and had her institutional debut in 2016 with a solo exhibition at the Lentos Kunstmuseum in Linz. In 2021 she curated the exhibition *Beyond the Image* at the Salon am Schwarzenbergplatz in Vienna.

There are three recurring elements in the paintings of Athens-based artist **David Benforado**: earth, sea, and sky. This might give the impression that he is a landscape painter, but this is only true to a certain extent. He is primarily a “pure” painter, literally making and mixing his own colors with pigments. The canvas is, for him, both a possibility to evoke a landscape as a surface that reflects an inner state of being, and a panel of thoughts. Every painting has its own logic and sometimes even its own will when the work is being developed, the artist notes. Chance and control are kept in balance. Through color and gesture, a space is evoked, with glimpses of the outside world. Benforado has a special talent for evoking lightness in a darker space. What may at first appear rough is full of details, refined in terms of color orchestration. In 2018 he participated in the exhibition *The Poetry of Memory* at the Contemporary Art Museum of Crete. In 2021 he was selected for Italy’s nationwide project *Una boccata de Arte*, organized by the Fondazione Elpis, which included a solo show in Tratalias, Sardinia.

The exhibition is curated by Berlin-based writer and curator **Jurriaan Benschop**. He is the author of the essay book *Salt in the Wound* (Garret Publications, 2019) for which he traveled across the European continent, to speak with artists about their work and their artistic roots. His reviews, interviews and essays can be found in *Artforum*, on *Arterritory.com*, as well as in exhibition catalogs and books. Exhibitions that he has curated include *Re: Imagining Europe* (Berlin, 2017), *Taking Root* (Düsseldorf, 2019-20) and *A Matter of Touch* (Berlin, 2020).