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All is Yet to Come—A Review of Bracha L. Ettinger's exhibition

Creston Davis | 06/27/2016



Here, there, memory, forgetting, world, shadow, time and elsewhere: the elusive figure of Eurydice haunts lines bent on separation—the fixed. And, for a time, she appeared in New York at Callicoon Fine Arts in-between color, lines, history and the present. The exhibition featured one of the world-leading artists, Bracha L. Ettinger, a renowned philosopher and psychoanalyst the inventor of worlds.

I was there and lost track of time. The gallery was closing, marking time that had for me disappeared amidst paintings, sketch-books, diaries, photo-graphs and photo-copies, as if I were rummaging through a forgotten private box in an attic. Worlds, shadows, memories marked and fading. Stolen memories encountered at once familiar and foreign.

Ettinger's work is uncategorical as it defies borders, piecing and re-articulating histories whilst creating new trans-passive horizons of time and space. Uncanny connections twist and alight between the in-between, underneath, the back and foregrounds.

The encounter with her work challenged my own ready-made impositions—to im-pose and mark out the world: here, there, beginning, end. History with a capital "H" stories with no 'h' at all. Instead of marking out worlds as a surveyor does in taming the wild-spaces through the mathematical, the currents reversed in a non-centered vortex: space without extension, extension devoid of time.

At first, you become the object surveyed without reference to Archimedes without reference to any-Thing at all. And yet the "you" is lost like Eurydice after the snakebite: A lost object of love and longing. And even the act of naming is deferred and delayed as some paintings bare the name of a future name-to-come: a desire without a name....

Objects of desire without beginning or end appear: No Title Yet, no. 2; No Title Yet; No Title Yet, 2015. And here, this European painter reminds us of a world without end, of desires without objects, of lines without geometry. All is yet to come. All.

One of the central features of The New European Painters of which Bracha L. Ettinger is a leading contributor is the recasting of the dialectical relationship between image and memory that infuses into the matrix a haunting specter within the work. In Bracha's work, especially in her oil paintings, you are confronted with traces of remote images interwoven within the process of the work itself that develops ghostly presences nearly invisible but with tactitiliarily palpable force. We discover when gazing at Ettinger's work that we are already caught-up short. One's reminded of Hans-Georg Gadamer's central points in perhaps the most famous hermeneutical text in the 20th century, Truth and Method namely a de-subjectivization process within a horizon of existence in which you realize that it is not you (as ego) determining meaning but you are rather "caught-up" in an oceanic process.

This effect gives rise to a pre-existing even primordial de-subjective relationship between the materiality of her work and one's own experiences of being-in-the-world. You are not so much the one who...decides, makes judgments and must figure the puzzle of the aesthetic experience out...but rather you are released from the burden of making sense of meaning. This space thus gives us the freedom to experience and even to synthesize the indeterminable blind-spots of trans-subjective experience or even trauma. The world cracks open with the all of being continuing to usher itself forth from the void behind the veil of appearances. You are—in a process of becoming more, the all.



Prof. Ettinger's art is riddled with central themes found within psychoanalysis including the notion of "Gaze". This is fitting, as among other ventures she is herself a psychoanalyst. My friend, Slavoj Žižek defines it so: "Gaze is that obscure point, the blind-spot, from which the object looked upon returns the gaze." And here we enter into a haunting zone again because it is through the recognition of ourselves in the other that we come into being as ourselves that is always different from the perspective of our own ego. Gaze-logic defines Ettinger's work in the sense that when you look at it, you feel the resistance of it as always already peering back upon you. And gaze is not simply someone looking at you—things gaze upon you too and sometimes things and persons blend together especially as objects of memory come into sense-experience.

The books of notes, that remain a seminal hallmark to Ettinger's work, reproduce this crack of the all as they too unleash narratives and both work with and are disjointed from the sketches that accompany them. The colors, inks, and different genres converge and give rise to allusions and horizons past and present of meaning and memory. These pluralities of genres and media clarify how theorizing and the process of thinking itself as an unfolding and infinite process, is an inherent and unforgettable aspect of the artist's entire universe and activity; indeed it is the recreation of worlds themselves.

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The Graces, Medusa, No. 1 2006-2012 (reproduced with permission)