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AGATHE DE BAILLIENCOURT
Reactance
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Towering colour gradients, fluctuating, fragile, light in colour and full of striking contrasts: these paintings, located in the resonance chamber of autonomous abstract colour field painting, embody upward striving, light urgency and, at the same time, its tipping point. In *Reactance*, her first solo show at Vera Munro, Agathe de Bailliencourt (*1974, Paris) presents six paintings from two extensive series (2017–2019).

At first glance, the works may appear expressive, but they are more conceptually grounded – painterly formulations of gravity and gesture. "I work with experimental methods," says the artist, "to materialise the fragile, fleeting and unpredictable moment of falling."
Her painting is oriented towards processes in which things lose their balance, inspired by the artistic potential of instability, as expressed, for example, in Fischli/Weiss's *Der Lauf der Dinge* (*The Way Things Go*, 1987) or their *Equilibres* (1984–87).

Gravity, then, that falling (and literally the accident {in German "Zu-Fall," also meaning "chance"}), manifests itself in these paintings as flowing, dripping, layering – independent of complete control by the artistic hand. And yet, this is not arbitrary: De Bailliencourt opens up conceptually clear scope for the free flow of colour. She applies specific framework conditions to all works in a series. This concerns, for example, the precise pre-selection of colours, the cumulative image structure, standardised formats and the use of unprimed fabrics such as jute, cotton or linen as the base material. The artist devotes a great deal of time and care to the selection and composition of the colours in advance. Over several days, she produced samples of finely nuanced mixtures, matched the colours after drying to the respective carrier materials in order to precisely determine their effect and interplay. Each painting is therefore based on an individual, complex recipe, and while nothing about the overall tone of a colour concept is left to chance, it nevertheless emerges in an unpredictable way within an expressly incalculable painting process. De Bailliencourt thus made tensions and contradictions visually powerful, starting with the colour scheme. Here, she 'looked for shrill, garish tones,' contrastingly also incorporating the carrier material into the colour mixture. "I tried to combine the neon colours with other "normal" colours and the support material,' she says, 'aware that I don't particularly like the natural colour of jute, for example."

She carries out the act of painting itself intensively, relatively quickly and always in the tension between control and loss of control: "The paintings were created while standing, leaning against the wall," says the artist, 'gravity was relentless.' Each painting was completed on the same day it was started – as evidenced by the titles, which link the date of creation with a sequential serial number, such as *March 18–45* (2018), *April 19–51* (2019), *October 18–48* (2018) or *January 19–88* (2019). In conversation, de Bailliencourt describes the painting process as an intense artistic struggle. On the one hand, she brought her desire for form and design into the painting process, but on the other hand, she largely entrusted it to the dynamics between the paint, the substrate and gravity: "Gesture and gravity are directly and irrevocably inscribed into the fibre and the finished work," she says. At

the beginning, she also decided whether a figure would lean to the right or left, then painted from top to bottom, quickly, without having a clear overview of how the figure would develop. In several passes, she then worked on individual layers, enlarging, thickening or reinforcing the flow, depending on the viscosity of the paint and support material. In some works, the artist added paper or other materials beneath the paint to subtly build volume – this can be seen here in *April 19–53* (2019), for example.

The special character of this painting also results in an astonishing visual effect: while the central image of the works is clearly anchored in the fibres of the respective support material, the overall impression is nevertheless that it protrudes slightly forward. This gives the pictures an elusive depth and an ambivalence that carries with it something quietly unsettling.

In structural terms, de Bailliencourt thus succeeds in achieving what is crucial for her: "It was important to me to capture in paint that moment when a form is on the verge of collapsing completely. I want to hit that extreme point of imbalance." In the six works in this exhibition, this is evident in very different ways - and it also makes it clear that de Bailliencourt does not formalise or formally restrict her work within the framework of concept and seriality, but that her painting can unfold all the more on the basis of serial impulse and surprise us anew in each picture.