



Strained Intimacies

Lenz Geerk – Rute Merk – Alexis Ralaivao

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We can think of life as a series of choices. Like a circuit of actions-reactions that build an algorithm of our own making. Are we, then, a result of the external factors that shape our circumstances and influence these choices? How does the weight of these questions leave marks on our faces, gestures, postures?

This show brings together voices that explore these questions through their work. Rute Merk's paintings walk us through a labyrinth of her own design. In that parallel universe, the sky is a shimmering aurora and there are no spatial markers to ground us. The background is as much of a protagonist as the character. It's the juxtaposition of the dynamic colors behind the quiet subject that creates tension in the painting. Each element sends a different message creating a discrepancy that leaves us wanting more. In the absence of geography, we shift our focus to the subjects which doesn't bring much resolve. The painting is a closed loop that leaves us with more questions than answers.

In *Viola, 2021*, a woman, arms crossed on railings, nonchalantly gazes back at us. Her blank expression gets caught in an inscrutable conversation with Lenz Geerk's subjects: pianists, seated by their metronomes. The character's inertia and taciturn faces bequeath tautness. Think of each of Geerk's paintings as a piece of an unsolvable puzzle. There's an unsettledness that mixes with refinement permeating the layers of the image. The pianists speak less with their facial expressions and more with their bodies. We are catching the tail end of the concert and can feel the vibration of the last note in the air.

With Alexis Ralaivao's work, we're greeted with an ethereal light that lends itself to an invitation. It bathes the skin in a glow that beckons to touch. The paintings are dreamlike. The warm tones seamlessly blend together weaving an ode to tenderness. Each piece is a snippet of a larger love story. A necklace rests against a collarbone. Pearls cascade down a pillow. Elsewhere, hands caught as they're about to peel clementines conjure an image of sensuous intimacy. The colors, soft as silk, render us closer to a stranger we've never met, and yet, still feel fondness for. Our gaze is that of the lover, not of the external observer. It is in the crevices of these intimate moments that love resides: in the subtleties of the quotidian.

There's a symphony that comes together when these three artists are brought in one room. Their world is timeless; their geography, porous. Stripped of space-time markers, the characters simply exist through their stillness.