

Press release

Julie Mehretu | *Metoikos (in between paintings)*

17 September – 13 November 2021

Opening: Thursday, 16 September 2021, 6 – 9 pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to announce *Metoikos (in between paintings)* the third solo exhibition of American artist Julie Mehretu. A sense of volatility marks Julie Mehretu's most recent canvases. Roiling black lines, smudges, eruptions of color, and halftone patterns unfold atop lucid, saturated grounds, which are countered by luminous shapes and fragments that seem to hover above the tangled compositions like a simmering, spectral residue. As the art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson notes about the Mehretu's formal transitions over the past decade, "The clean, centripetal choreography that once stood for the global has given way to contaminated streams and surges."

Mehretu considers abstraction a space of unknowing, of possibility—that which offers something beyond language, a space of potential that cannot be articulated otherwise. Painting is thereby a means, in Mehretu's words, to "think through the struggle in an alternative, abstract way." Her newest works respond to a diverse set of images related to current events, ranging from immigrant detention centers and social upheaval to ecological disasters. These photographs, some of which she keeps in her studio for months or even years before finding a point of entry for the work, form the "DNA" of the painting. Using Photoshop, Mehretu distorts the image beyond recognition, at times combining multiple images, before building a layered composition with paint, screenprint, airbrush, and ink. Subsumed beneath accumulations of riotous, luminous marks, the specificity and source of the image is sublimated yet remains, as Mehretu claims, the "pain and the source of the image."

Parallel to the new paintings, Mehretu will also display a suite of etchings entitled *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (2020). Distorted news images of anti-immigration protests comprise the base layers of these prints, whose title cites Joan Didion's canonical 1967 essay, which itself quotes William B. Yeats' poem *The Second Coming* (1919). Created during a moment marked by the uncertainty of a global pandemic, the rising tide of racially-motivated violence and police brutality, and the creeping spread of fascist authoritarianism, Mehretu harnesses both the dread and the precarious sense of openness present in both literary works to articulate a communal space guided by intuition, an "ontological congregation of resistance."

Julie Mehretu (b.1970, Addis Ababa) lives and works in New York City. She was named one of the "100 most influential people" by Time Magazine in 2020. Other selected awards and honors include the "Liberty Award for Artistic Leadership" given each year by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC), New York (2018); The US State Department's "National Medal of Arts" (2015); The American Academy's "Berlin Prize" (2007); and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's "MacArthur Fellowship" (2005).

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York recently co-organized a mid-career survey of Mehretu's work, which also traveled and will travel to the High Museum, Atlanta and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Her work has been exhibited extensively in museums and biennials including at the Carnegie International (2004–05), Sydney Biennial (2006), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010), dOCUMENTA (13) (2012), Sharjah Biennial (2015), Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2017), Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, UK (2019); and the 58th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia (2019).