

**GALERIE
ALLEN**

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PRESS / PRESSE

MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Slime of Time

15 October 2022 – 26 November 2022

Vernissage
15 October 2022
14h – 20h

Galerie Allen, Paris
6 passage Sainte-Avoye
Paris 75003

ABOUT THE ARTIST

O'Callaghan's works explore human behaviour and psychology in relation to notions of resistance, endurance and transformation. Her video, performance, installation and paintings depict bodies pushed to the limit, such as Ensemble, a video where a single performer stands in a field struggling against the force of a high-pressure water cannon and ultimately triumphs. Here and in much of her work, the human body is a site of agency and resilience through which to investigate individual and collective freedom.



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ENGLISH :

Slime of Time will be Mel O'Callaghan's third solo exhibition at Galerie Allen.

GESTURE AND RESONANCE

In 2016, while writing about Mel O'Callaghan's paintings, I observed in them a movement of auscultation, a form of human resistance when confronted with the sensation of loss.

These paintings, the first ones in this series, faced us with a sensitive process that examined a determined search for the probable mechanisms of this act of resistance and an approximation of its causes. The act that foreshadows the resistance is by itself a possibility to confront us with absurdity, which is enigmatic and therefore incomprehensible as a given fact of experience. But what appears to us absurd in this work only finds its matrix on the surface of its skin, in the immediacy of the appearance and, in the more recent pieces, in subjective experience, as well as in the presence of a reverberation.

The loss is, in this way, a transmutation of the passage from one state to the other, between matter that moves in space and reconstructs itself, changing its psychological, metaphysical, almost magmatic territory. Nevertheless, on all these layers operates an act of resistance that guards its essential qualities, as if testing the continuous return to itself.

In a passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche establishes a connection between what is seen and what our imagination projects onto the reverse of a surface, which by showing itself remains separate from the word that could designate it¹. With this in mind, O'Callaghan's works constitute a line of thought and research through which the artist constructs a connection – not a narrative – between different typologies of resistance. In this respect, her working process has developed, expanding its research into a more performative approach and exploring the concept of corporeality across a wider scope.

O'Callaghan interweaves various references and processes of knowledge, such as literature, scientific research and memories of the experience of her own works to create poetic structures that employ such non-verbal communication forms as the empathy of molecular vibration and tectonic sounds from the depths of the Pacific Ocean, as well as the sculptural elements her recent paintings evince. This other dimension of her work, which does not deviate from the resistance mentioned at the beginning of this text, ushers in a visual reconfiguration of the works, defining a playful approach through new textures and deep, membrane-like layers in the paintings. Within this new network of aesthetic and phenomenological relationships, sound is a material that, besides shaping the space, asserts itself as a physical entity that is present in two rather unique pieces, two glass tuning-forks that when struck emit a sound in the frequency of 200 Hz. That musical note alludes to a divine form of communication and empathy between bodies that resonate mutually. Accordingly, painting, as one of the artistic media that is most immediately connected to the gesture, brings into this exhibition a spirituality that is intrinsic to it but is reconfigured within a context of actions and gestures that, though seemingly remote from it, actually belong to it. Mel O'Callaghan creates a new sphere of experience that combines a variety of sensitive substances and poetic transitions, in an approach akin to the one of Clarice Lispector², one of her favourite writers: "I noticed a first rumble like that of a heart beating beneath the earth. I quietly put my ear to the ground and heard summer forcing its way in and my heart beneath the earth."

Going back to resistance and permanence, they find themselves here in a perpetual relationship, transmuted by the prevalence of colour that resounds in our eyes, something almost absurd, but unnameable.

– João Silvério

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'At Noon', *Thus Spoke Zarathustra – A Book of All and None*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, pp. 223-25.

² Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, New Directions, 2012, p. 56.

FRANÇAIS :

You Turn Your Back On Me sera la deuxième exposition personnelle de Trevor Yeung à la Galerie Allen.

DES GESTES, DES RÉSONANCES

En 2016, en écrivant un essai au sujet des peintures de Mel O'Callaghan, j'ai perçu comme une tentative d'examen de cette forme de résistance propre à l'être humain quand il est confronté au sentiment de la perte.

Ces peintures, les premières de cette série, nous mettent face à une exploration sensible et assidue des rouages sous-jacents à cet élan de résistance, tout en cherchant à en déterminer les causes. L'action qui préfigure cette résistance repose sur la possibilité même de nous confronter à l'absurde, dont la nature énigmatique nous est incompréhensible en tant que pure contingence du vécu. Mais ce qui nous paraît absurde dans cette œuvre trouve son origine dans son enveloppe charnelle, sa peau, dans l'immédiateté d'une apparition et, au sein d'œuvres plus récentes, dans l'avènement d'une expérience subjective, dans l'écho d'une réverbération.

De cette manière, le deuil correspond à une transmutation, au passage d'un état à l'autre, où la matière se meut à travers l'espace et se reforme, en changeant les contours d'un territoire psychologique, métaphysique et presque magmatique. Pourtant, parmi tous ces niveaux, un effort de résistance reste à l'œuvre, conservant ses qualités intrinsèques, comme s'il mettait à l'épreuve un perpétuel retour à lui-même.

Nietzsche, dans un chapitre d'*Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*¹, a établi un lien entre ce que l'on voit et ce que notre imagination projette en deçà ; la surface qui se révèle restant bien distincte du mot qui pourrait la désigner. Dans cette optique, les œuvres d'O'Callaghan ouvrent des perspectives de pensée et de recherche à travers lesquelles l'artiste établit des liens — et non un récit — entre différentes typologies de résistance. À cet égard, son processus de travail a su évoluer et ses recherches ont débouché sur une approche plus performative qui lui permet d'élargir le cadre d'exploration du concept de corporéité.

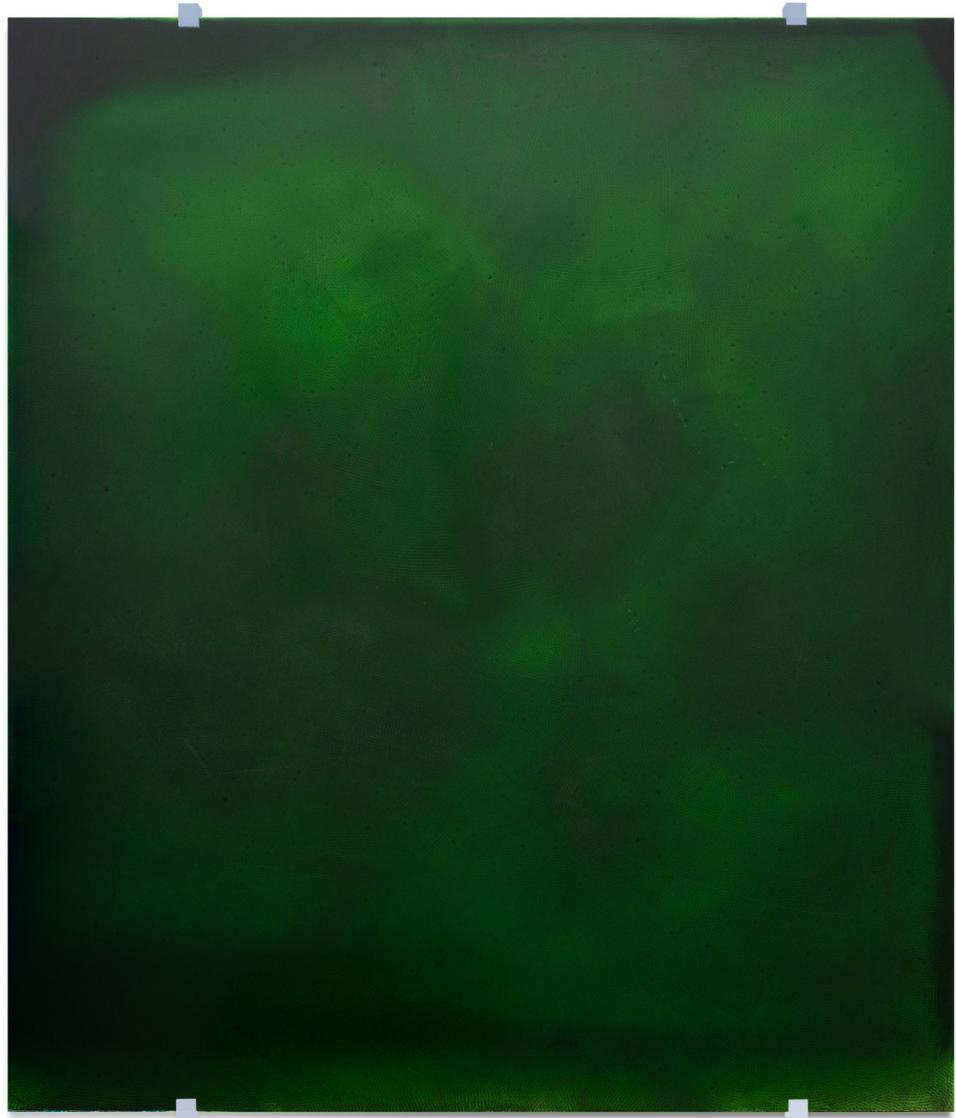
O'Callaghan entrecroise des références et des modèles de connaissance variés, allant de la littérature à la recherche scientifique, en passant par le souvenir de l'expérience sensible de ses propres créations, pour créer des structures poétiques qui mettent en œuvre des formes de communication non verbale, de l'empathie associée à la vibration moléculaire aux sons générés par l'activité tectonique issue des profondeurs de l'océan Pacifique, comme en atteste la dimension sculpturale de ses peintures les plus récentes. Cet autre aspect de son travail, qui ne fait pas l'abandon de la notion de résistance évoquée plus haut, inaugure une reconfiguration visuelle de ses œuvres, en posant les bases d'une approche ludique à travers de nouvelles textures et des tableaux traversés par différentes couches à la fois profondes et quasi-membraneuses. À l'intérieur de ce nouveau réseau de relations esthétiques et phénoménologiques, le son est un matériau qui, en plus de façonner l'espace, s'affirme comme une entité physique avec deux œuvres singulières, deux diapasons de verre qui, lorsqu'ils sont frappés, émettent une onde sonore correspondant à une fréquence de 200 Hertz. Cette note de musique nous renvoie à quelque chose de divin dans la compréhension et l'empathie qui unissent les corps quand ils entrent en résonance mutuelle. En tant qu'une des formes d'art les plus intimement liées au geste, la peinture introduit ainsi dans cette exposition une spiritualité qui lui est propre même si cette dernière s'inscrit dans le contexte d'une série de mouvements et d'actions qui en semblent éloignés — alors qu'ils lui appartiennent bel et bien. Mel O'Callaghan convoque ici un nouveau paradigme de l'expérience combinant matériaux sensibles et transitions poétiques, ce qui n'est pas sans rappeler l'approche de Clarice Lispector², l'une de ses écrivaines favorites : «Mais je percevais une première rumeur, tel un cœur battant sous la terre. Calme, je collais mon oreille à la terre et j'entendais l'être frayer sa voie à l'intérieur et mon cœur sous la terre [...]».

Pour en revenir aux thèmes de la résistance et de la permanence, ils se retrouvent ici perpétuellement mis en relation, transmutés par la prédominance d'une couleur qui sait entrer en résonance avec notre regard, quelque chose à la limite de l'absurde mais qui demeure indicible.

— João Silvério
Traduit de l'anglais par Noam Assayag

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, « Midi », Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra : Un livre pour tout le monde et personne, Garnier-Flammarion, 1969.

² Clarisse Lispector, Chroniques, des femmes - Antoinette Fouque, 2019.



MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Eerie, eerie, esoteric, greenish with the slime of time, 2022

Acrylic paint, pigment on glass

160cm x 140cm

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Allen, Paris



MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Everything in the world began with a yes (after PFR, 2022)

Acrylic paint, silver pigment on glass

160cm x 140cm

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Allen, Paris

Left to chance and chemistry, the interactions of pigments produce nuanced variations in tone, texture, and form. Gradual tonal shifts that reveal themselves over a period of extended observation liken O'Callaghan's paintings to Rothko's transcendent late works. The paintings' meditative quality is understood when considered in the context of her video and performance works. O'Callaghan's paintings are the result of a physical challenge that requires two people, working in tandem, to manipulate the glass using their whole bodies. Extending this notion of all-inclusiveness to the making of her paintings, O'Callaghan frames painting in terms of dance and ritual.

— Mara Hoberman in Artforum



MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Oscultation, 2022

Acrylic paint, gold pigment on glass

45cm x 45cm

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Allen, Paris



MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Ear to the ground and hear summer, 2022

Acrylic paint, pigment on glass

45cm x 45cm

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Allen, Paris



MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Jaltarang - Ramrao, 2022

Acrylic paint, silver pigment and ink on glass

45cm x 45cm

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Allen, Paris



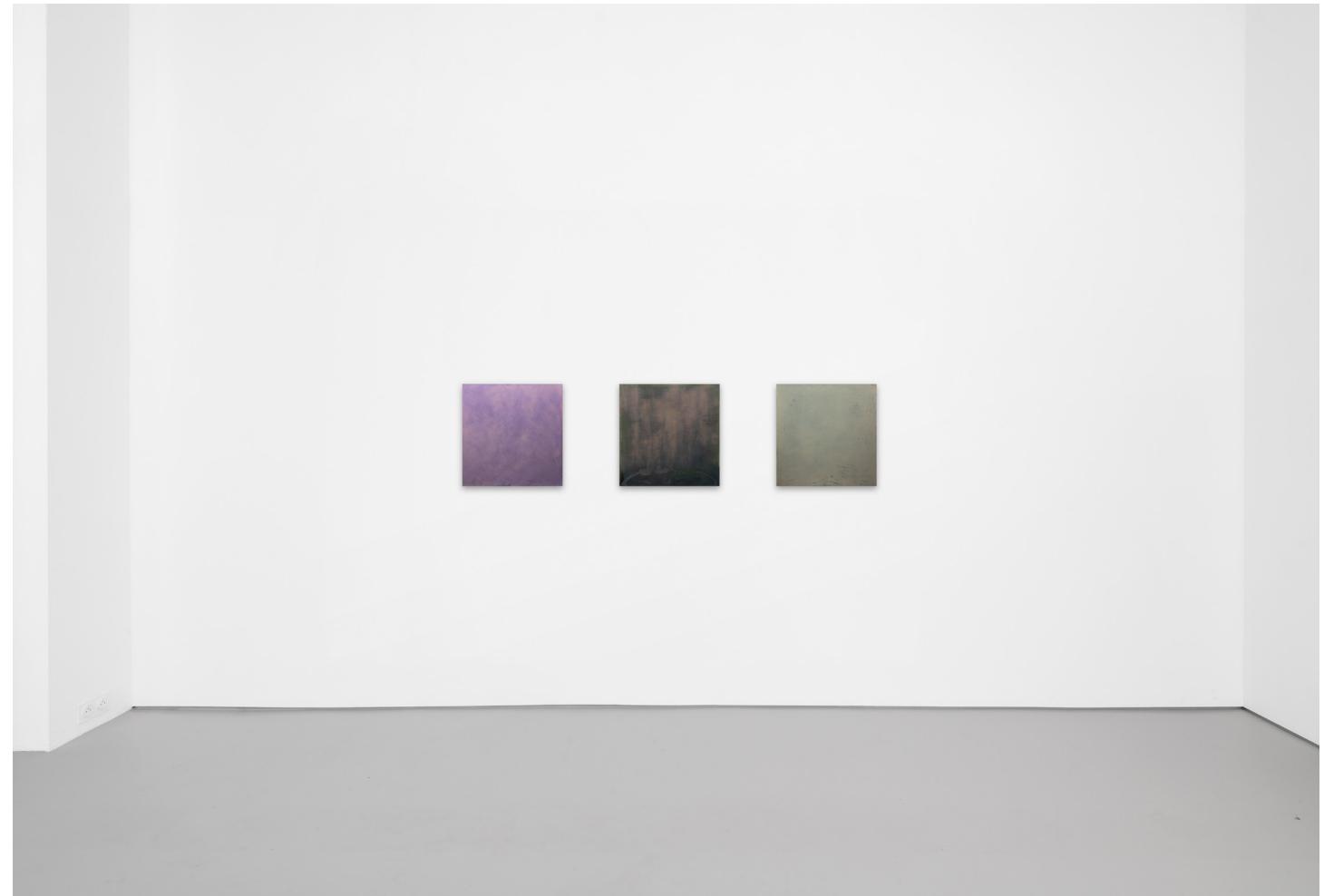
MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Communion, 2022
Glass tuning forks
49 x 35 x 2.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Allen, Paris



MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Slime of Time, 2022
Visualisation



MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Slime of Time, 2022
Visualisation

MEL O'CALLAGHAN

The body – in its broadest sense – permeates Mel O'Callaghan's video, installation, augmented reality, painting, sound and performance work. Communion and resonance with nature, and with each other, is at the heart of her practice. Born out of extensive research, long-term collaboration and exchange with oceanographers, microbial ecologists, performers, musicologists and psychologists, environmentalists and rights activists, she investigates notions of resistance, endurance and transformation in the body and the environment. In her video and performance works she traces places and practices centred around sites on earth that are said to remain similar to when life first emerged. Responding to the start of multicellular life on earth and the desire of a single cell to double, she relates the impulse of the primordial cell to our inclination to connect.

Mel O'Callaghan (b. 1975, Sydney, AU) lives and works in Paris. She graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Visual Art and Science Architecture and received a Masters of Fine Arts in Research from the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Recent solo exhibitions have been presented at Carriageworks, Sydney (2022); UQ Art Museum (2020); Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers (2019); Artspace, Sydney (2019); National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2018); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2017) and Casa-Museu Medeiros, Lisbon (2015).

Group exhibitions include, Seoul Museum of Art; Musee National d'Art Moderne / Centre Pompidou, Paris; Centre Pompidou, Museum of Contemporary Art - MOCA Toronto, Canada ; Malaga; Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila; Outset Contemporary Art Fund, Jerusalem; Serralves Museum, Porto; Gillman Barracks, Singapore; Museo D'Art Contemporanea Di Roma (MACRO), Rome; Centre d'Art Santa Mònica (CASM) Barcelona; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Institut d'art contemporain IAC, Lyon; National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taipei; Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Le Printemps de Septembre, Toulouse; Nuit Blanche, Paris; 19th Biennale of Sydney, Australia and Biennale Videobrasil, São Paulo. In 2017 Palais de Tokyo and Sam Art Projects published a catalogue of her work.

Her artwork is held in private and public collections such as FRAC Bretagne, Rennes, France; UQ Art Museum, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia; National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Australia; Monash University Museum of Modern Art (MUMA), Australia; Artbank, Australian Government Art Collection, Australia; Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, USA and the Attorney Generals Department, Australian Government.

In 2020 Artspace, UQ Art Museum and Le Confort Moderne published her first monograph.

She was a finalist in the Prix Meurice in 2018 and the recipient of the Prix SAM pour l'art contemporain in 2015.

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