



CLAIRE TABOURET

Eclipse

January 27—March 4, 2017

Night Gallery is pleased to announce *Eclipse*, an exhibition of new work by Claire Tabouret. The artist's first show at the gallery, it will open on January 27 and remain on view through March 4, 2017. An opening reception will be held on Friday, January 27 from 7:00 until 10:00pm.

In paintings and monoprints, at large scale and in intimate formats, Claire Tabouret depicts figures and landscapes in states of appearance and disappearance. Though she often (but not always) works from pre-existing photographic images connected to particular historical narratives, she pursues her chosen subjects as if they were living entities, allowing them to assume new and unexpected forms in her art. Eventually she leaves pre-existing sources behind as a freer, more personal, and more expressive painterly vocabulary emerges. Distinctions between figure and ground are blurred, creating spaces charged with psychological and emotional depth.

The exhibition's title alludes to the human propensity for noticing things that are in the process of being obscured; when the sun or moon 'go missing' because they are eclipsed, the natural order of things appears changed, resulting in a heightened sense of symbolic portent. At the same time, it describes Tabouret's approach to painting itself, in which pigment and medium are employed first to set a scene, then to obscure it, and finally to reveal its facets in new and unexpected ways. Many of the works in *Eclipse* feature images of people—including the explorer and writer Isabelle Eberhardt, the artist Agnes Martin, and the writer Robert Walser—who themselves engaged in meaningful acts of disappearance, and who became known, in part, precisely because they willed themselves to become unknown. Others depict groups of figures whose individuality is on the verge of slipping away into the social contexts that threaten to engulf them.

Despite the narrative intensity that characterizes her work, the effects Tabouret generates are rooted in her ability to construct precise chromatic settings for each image. The paintings begin with a single bright hue that defines the subsequent composition, even if the latter appears dark or muted upon first glance. This imbues the images with a quiet, all-over luminosity akin to moonlight. Because Tabouret uses these foundational hues to paint the sides of her canvases, they also serve as unifying elements throughout her exhibitions, bringing together works depicting different subjects. Color and mood are no less the focus of her practice than the topical issues that animate her imagery.

This oscillation between formal exploration and embodied historical research finds particularly cogent expression in a large portrait of Isabelle Eberhardt (a recurring presence in Tabouret's recent exhibitions) mounted on a horse. Based on one of the few existing photographs of this iconoclastic woman at the end of her short life, the painting depicts a ghostly figure in flowing garments and a wide-brimmed hat, her back turned to the viewer as she rides into a thicket of palm trees. Eberhardt, born and raised in Switzerland in the late 1870s, renounced her social privilege in order to immerse herself in North African culture. She converted to Islam, spoke Arabic, dressed and passed as a man, and traveled throughout Algeria. Her unorthodox lifestyle was a thorn in the side of the French authorities whose imperialist project she criticized in her writing, and her death was as mysterious as her life: Eberhardt was killed in 1904 when the mud shack she was inhabiting collapsed around her in a flash flood.

Tabouret renders Eberhardt and her horse as parts of a continuous whole with the landscape through which they move. Many of the swooping gestures that make up her clothing, the limbs of her horse, and the fronds of the palm trees bleed into one another, suggesting that none of these elements is truly discrete. Rather, they are all iterations of a single overarching motion that characterizes the pathos and curiosity of its subject's life; the painting is a portrait both of Eberhardt's penchant for obscurity and her ever-changing self-image, and it channels the powerful pull exerted on her by the land that captivated and ended up consuming her. The conflation between identity, disappearance, and landscape is also an important theme in the works inspired by Agnes Martin—for whom the desert was a refuge—and Robert Walser, who lived the latter part of his life in sanatoriums, and whose sudden death in a field of snow on Christmas has become a prominent part of his legacy. A snow-filled landscape, for instance, evokes the strange poetry of these circumstances, granting ethereal visual presence to a final act of disembodiment.

However, even in the case of works in which Tabouret has rendered figures largely created from her own imagination, she foregrounds themes of self-effacement, navigating the terrain between total anonymity and extreme individualism. In a series of smaller portraits of women seen from the shoulders up, for example, the distinctive 'makeup' applied to their faces resembles mud, at once hiding them from view and calling attention to their appearance (the mud also recalls the circumstances of Eberhardt's untimely death). In the artist's monoprints, meanwhile, the tension between individual and group identities is articulated through a taut formal metaphor: imagery can be repeated from one print to the next, but the nature of the technique means that no two compositions can be the same, and that sameness always gives way to difference. Tabouret's work suggests that absence is a powerful form of self-assertion, and that private acts of self-reflection can have profound social effects in the world at large.

In 2017, Claire Tabouret (b. 1981, Pertuis, France; lives and works in Los Angeles) will be the subject of solo exhibitions at YUZ Museum, Shanghai; Villa Médicis, Rome; Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille; and Le Creux de l'Enfer, Thiers, France. Recent institutional solo shows include *Sparkling Ghosts*, Museum Pietro Canonica à Villa Borghese, Rome (2016); *Duel au soleil*, Le Parvis centre d'art contemporain, Tarbes, France (2015); *Le regard, dedans, dehors*, Chapelle de La Visitation, Thonon-Les-Bains, France (2014) France. Recent group exhibitions include *VIVRE!*, La collection agnès b. at the Musée National de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris (2016); *Face to Face*, Palazzo Fruscione, Salerno, Italy (2016); *Portraits from the École des Beaux-Arts Paris*, Drawing Center, New York, NY (2015); *Bonjour La France!*, Seongnam Arts Center, Seongnam City, South Korea (2015); *Shit and Die*, Palazzo Cavour, Turin, Italy (2014); *L'illusion des lumières*, Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2014).