

Iulia Nistor

canary in a coal mine

April 28 – June 17, 2017

Tuesday – Saturday, 12 - 18 h

Potsdamer Strasse 77 - 87, 10785 Berlin

Galeria Plan B is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of Iulia Nistor, opening on the occasion of Gallery Weekend Berlin 2017.

An allusion to the caged birds that would warn miners when in danger, the exhibition title *canary in a coal mine* is nevertheless a metaphor for uncertainty and sensibility as a guiding principle. Over the past two years Iulia Nistor has been developing *Pieces of Evidence* – a format of paintings that share the dimensions 40 x 50 cm or 50 x 40 cm and are painted in oil on wood. A selection of works from this series is displayed in the main exhibition space and lead to three large canvases. Often large-scale paintings originate from the process of engaging in the possible meaning of a work from the *Pieces of Evidence*. Rather than seeing these interpretations as results, the ensuing works reveal their own conditions and limitations, our human need to make sense out of things and thus direct back to the phenomenal density of the *Pieces of Evidence* paintings.

“The paintings try to picture the faculties of sensation like mouth and ear, and the almost alchemical result of something entering these channels. Picturing them is also their remedy. We need a remedy because for Nistor they are inherently problems. If they can become material — graspable, paintable, brownish material— if we blind the eyes and make the ears deaf, maybe we will have excused ourselves from the demands they are implicated in, namely, that we see, hear, observe and understand, through denouncing even the responsibility of sight entailed in having a pair of eyes.

The concrete wall is artifice—concrete applied like paint to the existing gallery wall, but it poses as the reverse, the frame of a wall being exposed, something original, less handled and less manipulated. The premise that primitivity has something to do with truth and embodiment is a persistent idea with a long history, and these paintings have associations with many of its incarnations. The wall looks like a minimalist sculpture and works like one too. It is a finger pointed at the nice, variegated matching concrete ground and then to idealizations of the natural and industrial beyond. A wall is architecture but covering a wall in a concrete finish is more interior design referring to industrial spaces. Pictorial ground, a focus within the paintings, is doubly insisted on. If it is a pointing finger, the wall is also a magic wand, zapping the linked questions of tone and design that linger throughout the paintings right up beside them.

Brains are balls. The unconscious is one conception of what is underneath, and while it figures as a premise and subject throughout this work, the paintings are not expressions of it. We don't see what the hand can do or how it can move paint around, rather body parts—eyes, ears, brain—are subjects. Paintings of knots, bundles, or boulders, big balls, mostly single, large and centered, recall brains. We hold them, turning them over, looking at them in the light, ultimately to smother them to a halfway death in paint.

We aren't studying *her* hand we are studying *the* mind. The paintings deal with an interiority that is impersonal. Psychoanalysis falls away. Particularity, personality, personal experience are not the currency here. There's no use giving expression to the psychoanalytic subject which is handicapped and insufficient. Rather we have systems and diagrams, the look of science. One of the brain-cum-balls has a section like the door of a spaceship coming off its surface, but it's leaving from the backside so we still can't see what's inside. In consistent browned pastels, this verges on a cartoon representation of obscurantism. Like this doorway to the brain out of view, openings throughout the work reveal little.

Some paintings seem like they got turned flat and shaken and all the areas of color got neat like sand settling into sectioned off areas. Paint is used as a finish. The paintings resemble prints or photographs, images that went through a process or are the result of a series of procedures—allusions they were produced in a mechanical way. We say one can hold a thing at arm's length. The paintings are held at farther than arm's length, even though they are absolutely arm's length—paintings made with a brush in the hand. How does the brush get so long?

In the pictorial space of the paintings, subjects are held at a distance. Blue and green, like maps, and imposing from all three walls, the small room is a globe. This is the whole world. We see cross sections of land, like an ant farm. We're subterranean. Waves of water and areas of land are viewed from above. Objects and materials depicted feel at a consistent far away distance, though looking at the paintings you either have a telescope in hand or the aerial view from a helicopter.

Distance, muted colors, and a sense of mechanization stave off drama, but so does the implicit innocuousness of natural forms. You don't argue about rocks. When you're painting trees kind of far away in a landscape you should do it soft and mushy, you really just have to get the outline right and the colors right. Drama demands a protagonist, and all we have are separated brains, ears and eyes. There is a sense the paintings go in slow motion. We're at the beginning of a crescendo that stays and holds at the beginning, never finishing, never even gaining in anticipation.

Anti-drama begs an unusual question: Can painting be peaceful or must it agitate? Is either instance, if expressed through tone, a kind of design? Is art a place to find solace? Communication is reconstituted as tone, but the paintings are also a changing into, a fantasy of disappearance and reincarnation into brown balls and chunks, beans and rocks. This anti-drama, the paintings' placid plainness, crystallizes then the ultimate drama of her attempt to smother perception by putting a picture to it. Balance within the picture is maintained to allow a confrontation outside it. Nistor's work consistently recalls Courbet, the 19th century Realist painter who also sought a union between himself and his paintings of boulders, women sifting grain, and men breaking apart stones. For both, this dialectic of mind and body and then body and object entails a lust for innocence and a renouncing of the responsibility to communicate, recalling childhood, infancy, and a proposition of something like willed autism. In the end we can't get close enough to see whether what remains is a smooth little pebble, soft and sweet, or a rough colossal cliff. How big is the brain?

A critic of Courbet's time complained that realism's foolishness is believing the world is six-feet deep because one is myopic. The paintings show a bird, a diagram of vision, ears, and even a woman, but these soft living things, able to perceive and interpret, aren't lifelines and won't lead us out. I can't think of anything that conjures silence more than two painted ears. (Is paint the opposite of hearing?) Fragments of a head don't make a person. Rather we study, like books on how to socialize, how to win friends. Or a book on how to see or how to hear.

An unusual painting within the group is "Evidence E3 W4 A3", a sepia colored view of the ground showing the front half of a shoe, a big crumpled paper and a small rock, effectively our cliff and smooth pebble right beside each other. While many of the balls-cum-brains are not recognizable as things we encounter in life, this ball is trash on the ground. It is scaled and styled to carry a sense of wonder, beauty, and study only enhanced by its contrary base status as trash. To me, this painting shows her in confrontation, considering, through slow observation, how to make something hers. Maybe you can open a small stone and find soft layers like paper, but the inside of bunched up soft paper layers is really just stone. The painting recalls a feeling of looking for the first time. Literally the first or the start, as an infant, or the second first time when we first use a camera or learn to really draw.

Like the melodrama of the crumpled paper, the sense that there is actually more to it, that these things have meaning beyond their material and facts, a mystical meaning, is present throughout the paintings. If brains are balls, they are also circles, and they are circles to the same end that Hilma af Klint and Emma Kunz, other art historical touchstones for this work, painted their circles. Circles hold everything at once. They are pictures of wholeness, unity, and immanence. A circle is

a container. It's an entire environment, a complete world. It is the shape of the world, of the globe. It's a command center, like a brain. It is total, anti-conflict, compositionally the opposite of dynamism. Courbet's entire project can be understood as a similar pursuit of unity and one-ness through transfiguration, of merging everything with everything and then with himself. If the "Origine du Monde" for him is a vagina, it's possible that these women propose it as the ovum, in circle after circle after ball.

We are also in this painting of the shoe and the paper confronting the ground at an unusual (for these paintings) human scale and human distance—not by telescope or helicopter. We have come to the concrete (like the wall), to the lowest and the hardest, the start, the thing that has nothing inside. We've dug to China. We are at the beginning of the page still hitting delete. In Courbet's world, rural France in 1850, there were boulders and men working to break apart chunks of stone, Nistor has concrete. If we are turning ourselves into "stuff", into the most stuff kind of stuff and the most base kind of stuff, brown balls, beans and rocks, the ultimate exchange is with the ground, which now seeps onto the wall in concrete finish, in this image of pavement, and in an emphasis on pictorial ground throughout the paintings."

Sydney Schrader, *The Form of the Big Ball*

Iulia Nistor, born 1985 in Bucharest, Romania, lives and works in Frankfurt am Main. She studied painting at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Nürnberg with Thomas Hartmann and at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main, with Amy Sillman and Monika Baer.

Previous solo exhibitions include: Before Interpretation, Galeria Electroputere, Craiova (2015); .../.../..., Strabag Kunstforum, Vienna (2015); (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), Aiurart Contemporary Art Space, Bucharest (2014). Group exhibitions include: Ella CB & Iulia Nistor, JOHAN, Frankfurt am Main (2017); Track Changes, curated by Plan B at Mendes Wood DM, Sao Paulo (2016); Gardeners Digest: The Yew I, Societas Horti, Tbilisi (2016).

For more information, please contact the gallery at contact@plan-b.ro and +49.30.39805236.