

Off The Grid

Curated by Kiki Mazzucchelli

18 November 2021 – 24 December 2021

LAMB

32 St. George's Street

London

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Ana Prata (Sete Lagoas, BR, 1980), Merve Iseri (Istanbul, 1992), Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe (Sheroana, Amazon Forest, 1971), Daniel Ríos Rodríguez (Killeen, US, 1978), Alexandre Canonico (Pirassununga, BR, 1974), Anderson Borba (Santos, BR, 1972).

LAMB is pleased to present *Off The Grid*, a group exhibition featuring works by six artists who approach painting in unconventional ways. Departing from modern and contemporary pictorial traditions, they all create a unique visual language that originates from their own engagement with different cosmologies, art histories, procedures, and techniques. Therefore, what binds together this heterogeneous group of artists is both the idea of painting (understood as 'in the expanded field') and the singular way in which the works sit uncomfortably in relation to the so-called Western art canons.

Ana Prata (Sete Lagoas, BR, 1980) developed her career in São Paulo, where the 1980s painting scene had been predominantly dominated by male painters who favoured a neo-expressionist, transavantgarde style. After a hiatus in the 1990s, when conceptual art took over the circuit, Prata's was the first generation to fully embrace painting and bring it to the forefront in the new millennium - among her peers are renowned artists like Lucas Arruda, Marina Rheingantz, and others. In her work, the artist freely borrows a myriad of disparate references from art historical genres and movements, combining genuine reverence for the masters of the past with a tongue-in-cheek approach that gives rise, above all, to an ongoing inquiry about the nature and the possibilities of painting in the present. Over the past couple of years, Prata has been consistently exploring the still life genre, embracing a wide vocabulary of pictorial references ranging from naif art, abstraction, amateur Sunday painting, and many more, thus conflating binary categories such as high and low/erudite and outsider/ major and minor in works characterised by their exceptional use of colour and composition.

A skilful colourist in her own right, Merve Iseri (Istanbul, 1992) makes paintings that draw on personal and archetypal allegories. *Sev Kardesim* (2020/21) - titled after a traditional Turkish song - is a semi-figurative painting featuring two mysterious figures that seem engaged in some kind of unknown ritual against a background of expressive brushstrokes and flecks of vibrant colour. The work was started just before last year's first lockdown, and was only completed this Spring; the contrasting mood of the dark background and the colourful specks of paint perhaps reflecting the psychological changes experienced during this challenging year. Iseri is also present in the exhibition with a collection of small ink drawings, which she has been making daily over the past few months. These intuitive, humble, and precious little images have a diaristic quality, almost like records of different moods or interior landscapes which sometimes coalesce into recognisable images, other times becoming purely abstract, flux of consciousness impressions.

Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe (Sheroana, Amazon Forest, 1971) began his artistic career in the 1990s, when he learned to make artisanal paper out of endemic plant fibres from Mexican artist Laura Anderson Barbata. Though paper is not traditionally part of the Yanomami material culture, Sheroanawe adopted this medium to register and preserve his people's legacy, undertaking a contemporary revision of their cosmogony and imagery. Employing a synthetic visual language characterised by formal rigor, reduced color palette and the serialisation of pictorial elements, he creates an 'archive in process' of a culture that has been endangered since the arrival of the nape.¹ In face of this erasure, Hakihiiwe's works constitute acts of resistance by making permanent the patterns used in body painting, by registering the fauna and flora of his surroundings and by retrieving the mythological narratives of his ancestors. The works included in the exhibition are remarkable examples of Sheroanawe's sophisticated and precise technique, and of how he appropriates a traditional Western material (paper) as a medium for conveying Yanomami cosmogony.

While some of the artists present in *Off The Grid* can be more easily described as painters, others embrace three-dimensionality in works which seem to occupy an ambiguous place between object, sculpture, wall relief, and painting. The works of Daniel Ríos Rodríguez (Killeen, US, 1978) are often small-scale, intricate assemblages in which paint and objects are combined to create oneiric, semi-figurative compositions. With great craftsmanship, Rodríguez experiments not only with the use of ordinary materials (rope, stone, nails, and so on) on the pictorial surface, but quite often creates panels in irregular shapes that seem to emphasize the physicality of the work. There is something almost totemic about these works in that they seem pregnant with some mysterious kind of symbology, and yet they are devoid of any narrative or religious content. Ríos Rodríguez's pictorial vocabulary seems to draw on a multitude of forms that have been historically overlooked by mainstream art historical discourses. His is a vocabulary of the 'minor': folk, outsider, a personal cosmogony that resists interpretation whilst expanding painting into a very original unknown territory.

In a similar way, the wall reliefs by Alexandre Canonico (Pirassununga, BR, 1974) are constantly oscillating between sculpture and painting. Borrowing his visual vocabulary and procedures from the DIY universe, Canonico is interested in exploring and complicating the relationship between pictorial surface and volume, image and thing, or representation and actuality. His reliefs are often constructed with MDF panels, which are cut and reassembled in ingenious ways that make visible the interdependency between the many parts. To the dynamics between the parts that form these jigsaw-puzzle-like arrangements, Canonico adds spray-painted colour fields that produce different vibrations on the surface, sometimes creating areas of flat colour that bring the plane forward, sometimes adding fuzzy patches of colour that insinuate a depth of field. In some cases, the edges of the cut pieces inserted in the composition form outlines that are suggestive of figurative elements, in works that have an almost cartoonish quality. Above all, Canonico's work invites the viewer to exercise and expand their own power of perception, which can lead one to different or many directions at once.

Anderson Borba (Santos, BR, 1972) is a sculptor who works primarily with wood and has been recently developing a series of painterly wall reliefs. These small-scale pieces are made of the same type of common wood that Borba uses in his freestanding sculptures; wood which he often finds in skips around his East London studio. In the wall reliefs presented in *Off The Grid*, he intensifies and further develops some of the techniques used in previous works: first, the found wooden pieces are shaped, then burned until they acquire a dark complexion; another stage involves pasting magazine cut-outs onto the surface - which range from images from male gay magazines, idyllic landscapes, or an image of a Georgia O'Keefe painting -, followed by carving and varnishing, until the works become something between an ancient tablet and a very unusual type of painting. Borba's reliefs have an extremely tactile, bodily quality, something which is further enhanced by the skin-like aspect of the photographic images pasted onto the volumes.

Evading both the grand narratives of Western art history and topical issues of the present, the works in *Off The Grid* configure a group of extremely individual practices by artists who forge an aesthetic language that draws from often overlooked vocabularies. These are artists who are above all concerned with art-making and with the infinite possibilities that emerge from daily practice with materials and through looking at the kind of stuff that cannot be found in art history books.

¹ Enemy, foreigner, white people, those who are not Yanomami.