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Angela Grossmann: *With Themselves*

January 21st to February 18th, 2023

Reception for the artist: Saturday January 21st, 2 to 4pm

Equinox Gallery, Vancouver

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Expressive, fluid, and frequently elusive, Angela Grossmann's works may be thought of as traditional portraiture, but in fact she takes the genre in new directions. While Grossmann's depictions have a remarkable human likeness, more significantly she brings psychological insights into the representation of the female as visualized in western society. Grossmann depicts the body because she is empowered by it and familiar with it—through observations, memories, and lived experience—and has now been addressing it in her studio practice for over four decades. As a woman, she is able to externalize the complexities of the desiring gaze, bringing to the fore representations of people, that not only celebrate beauty, joy, and the maternal, but also embody melancholy, introspection, as well as a subject's own desires—in other words, unveiling the many dimensions of femininity.

Grossmann's newest body of work declares itself as a duet between the content and the paint itself; where the subject defines the painting as much as the paint defines the character of the subject. In Grossmann's words, "With some paint, I can barely control it, I can only follow its lead. It tells me how it wants to be painted." This series reveals Grossmann to be not only a stellar formalist but also a powerful colourist. From a wide palette, she chooses neon pink, ultramarine blue, flame red, glimmering gold and silver, using each colour monochromatically, allowing the unique emotive qualities of that hue to dominate a singular work. The artist explains: "Working with a bright colour is like navigating an exuberant force. Some colours are very measured or traditional, whereas others are tender, even stubborn." The relative intensity of pigment and the thickness of paint are also significant in these works; for example, the lustrous nature of gold, silver, and copper prompt unique viewing experiences because these iridescent paints reflect light differently depending on their thickness and on the viewer's position in relation to a light source. The selected colours also carry historical signifiers: gold was predominantly used to represent the spiritual, the metaphysical, and more broadly, the qualities of understanding and intuition, whereas silver is associated with wisdom and memory. The use of neon pink is a brash departure for the artist who associates this colour with rebellion and non-compliance, while the blues are more familiar and reliable, or, as Grossman suggests, "indefatigable." To maximize her expressive potential, the artist uses Mylar as the support, a smooth surface on which the paint glides easily and can be expertly manipulated to flow and drip along the extended length of these monumental paintings, suggesting an effortless gesture that in reality, is anything but carefree. These works are the outpouring of a muscular and mental knowledge that is well-rehearsed and deeply understood.

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Grossmann has remarked that the subjects emerging in her paintings exist outside of a particular time and place: “They are not by themselves but *with* themselves, psychologically felt and celebrated, for the beauty, pleasure, and burden of being female.” The nuanced gestures of her figures come not from sitters, but from an extended study of candid expressions in historical photographs. In her works, Grossmann generates an intensity of feeling that makes palpable the depth of her subjects, whether real or fictitious. At a time when human identities are being intensely analyzed not only in art but in everyday life, Grossmann revisits and expands the genre of figurative painting to arrive at an oscillation between personal reality and fabricated theatricality, a state that many people currently exist in.