

artillery

Pick of the Week: Bridget Mullen Shulamit Nazarian

Cole Sweetwood | August 4, 2021



Bridget Mullen, *Birthday Series #11*, 2021, Flashe on linen, 12 x 9 in. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

This month, Shulamit Nazarian is putting on two shows. The larger group show, “Intersecting Selves,” is an exploration of the overlap and tension between body, identity, and art. Many of the works are notable, particularly *Life* (2021) by Amir H. Fallah, *...for souls...for soles...between the cuts, beneath the leaves, below the soil...* (2021) from Ebony G. Patterson, and Julie Henson’s *Between Reality and Theater* (2021). But “Intersecting Selves” is not the Pick of the Week. Rather, the Pick of the Week is “Birthday,” an iterative collection of thirty-two paintings from Bridget Mullen.

At first, “Birthday” is unassuming; the twelve by nine-inch paintings are hung simply in a continuous row about a small gallery space. But as you approach them, there is a curious flash of recognition, like what one might feel when you encounter a familiar stranger or an unexpected mirror. Through the abstracted fields of color, figures and symbols begin to manifest in the symmetrical patterns. This thematic use of symmetry redoubles this effect, triggering that basic human instinct to seek out such patterns.

Where there was once a miasma of color spread across the head-sized canvases, now there are disembodied eyes, faces peering through canals, and lovers melting into a shared embrace. Taking in each of them, one at a time, all in a row, is a hypnotic experience. They create their own cadence, and as one begins to recognize the repetition you fall into it without even realizing. That’s not to say that they are all similar; far from it, each painting is as distant from the next as the works in the group show are from each other.

And that’s the core of what makes “Birthday” a fascinating exhibition. Ordinarily, works which are presented in a series build off each other, uniting to create some greater narrative. But for Mullen, each work has its independent story. They are stories that are in the process of being told but have been written long ago.

Though they offer no resolution, yet they each weave a fantastic tale. These stories – these paintings – exist on the precipice of completion, in a dichotomic space between acuity and abstraction, love and loss, existence and extinction.