

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

Fiona Rae

Messages

January 12 - March 9, 2024

91, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris 8^e



Fiona Rae, *Teach me to hear mermaids singing, 2023*
Oil and acrylic on linen, 152,4 x 127 cm / 60 x 50 in

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *Messages*, Fiona Rae's eighth solo exhibition with the gallery. The British artist is recognized on the international scene as one of the foremost abstract painters of her generation. This exhibition also celebrates thirty years of fruitful collaboration between the artist and the gallery.

Fiona Rae first studied art at Croydon College of Art in London, before going on to study at Goldsmiths College in 1984. It was during this period that she met Damien Hirst, Angela Bulloch, Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas and Michael Landy, amongst others, who all became known as part of the Young British Artists (YBAs) group. Together, they took part in the iconic *Freeze* exhibition organized by Damien Hirst in 1988. The rise of the YBAs to prominence in the 1990s was meteoric, so much so that today they embody the renaissance of the British art scene of the 1980s-2000s.

For almost forty years, Fiona Rae has been developing a body of work marked by a singular and constantly evolving aesthetic. Her work is rooted in unusual combinations of the history of painting, the graphic arts, European and Japanese cartoons, cinema and music. This new corpus continues the *Words* series begun in 2021, in which sentences and words are embodied on the canvas as a continuing investigation into the nature of abstraction. Fiona Rae's interest in alphabets and texts began at an early age; she initially studied English at university, before devoting herself entirely to contemporary art and to making paintings with an experimental approach to the possibilities of language. The artist's supple and precise gestures conjure up sensual compositions featuring a succession of letters in full flow. Freed from their initial function, the typographic characters depicted become purely abstract visual elements. Letters crisscross, merge, evaporate then collide, generating bursts of pictorial energy. Paradoxically, this dispersion keeps each composition in perfect balance.

Fiona Rae succeeds in reproducing the subtleties of language in the expressiveness of her brush marks. These simulate the intonations, plural sonorities and body movements that constitute the very essence of human expression. The observer's eye moves between the abstract forms, looking for ways to decipher them. The titles could function as indicators, facilitating the legibility of the exhibited works. Some refer to a Shakespearean phrase, others to a Disney cartoon, a comic strip, or even to Metaphysical poetry. Each composition is singular in its ability to embody both comedy and lofty ambition,

magnificence and absurdity, presence and absence, constraints and infinite possibilities. Fiona Rae's paintings slip in and out of legibility, generating time and again persistent enigmas in the pictorial plane. According to the artist, this is one of the key points of painting, which tends to "propose and solve visual problems that did not exist until the painter approached the canvas and started making marks."

With its blend of great precision and the inevitable accidents of painting, Fiona Rae's work reminds us that painting is alive and vibrant, and that this is true even in the 21st century. As the artist says, painting "is a live art form. It is a way of mining all the different parts of your consciousness, your unconscious, your subconscious, and making some kind of experience out of them directly on the canvas. There is something about the touch on the canvas that exhibits or exemplifies a set of feelings or ideas in that moment."¹

In today's increasingly contradictory and fast-paced world, Fiona Rae continues to paint with dedication and intensity. "If you want to survive—to thrive—you *must* keep operating, keep breathing. You must get back in the studio and keep painting."² says American art critic Christina Rees of Rae's work. Whilst being aware of the bleak face of our contemporary reality, the artist believes in renewal and the future. Fiona Rae's works suggest *Messages*, inviting us to enter the complexity of their world and to lose ourselves for a moment in an imaginary realm of the playful and the poetic.

¹Interview with Fiona Rae and Iwona Blazwick, *Il faut cultiver votre jardin : Fiona Rae and Iwona Blazwick*, Miles McEnergy Gallery publication, 2022

²Christina Rees, *I've Seen Things You People Wouldn't Believe: Fiona Rae in 2022*, Miles McEnergy Gallery publication, 2022

Born in Hong Kong in 1963, Fiona Rae lives and works in London.

Fiona Rae's work has been shown in recent major solo exhibitions at Centre d'art La Malmaison, Cannes (France, 2021-2022), Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery (UK, 2014), Southampton City Art Gallery (UK, 2014), Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne (UK, 2013), Leeds Art Gallery (UK, 2012), New Art Gallery, Walsall (UK, 2012). Previous solo exhibitions have included Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes (France, 2002), ICA London (UK, 1994) and Kunsthalle Basel (Switzerland, 1992).

The artist has exhibited in prestigious institutions, including Tate Modern, London (UK, 2023), MUDAM Luxembourg (Luxembourg, 2023), Milwaukee Art Museum (USA, 2023), Hunt Museum, Limerick (Ireland, 2022), Tate Britain, London (UK, 2019), Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (UK, 2017), Institute of Contemporary Arts of Singapore (Singapore, 2012), Tate Britain, London (UK, 2009), Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (Luxembourg, 2008), Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (Germany, 2007), Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai (China, 2006), Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (Germany, 2003), Tate Liverpool (UK, 2001), Fundacio Caixa, Palma de Mallorca (Spain, 2000), Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon (Portugal, 1997), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (Spain, 1996), Hayward Gallery, London (UK, 1994), Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (Netherlands, 1990) and Venice Biennale (Italy, 1990).

Fiona Rae has become one of the most important abstract painters of her generation, enjoying a significant presence in prestigious public and private collections such as the Tate Collection, London (UK); the Royal Academy of Arts, London (UK); the Fond National d'Art Contemporain, Paris (France); the Centre Pompidou, Paris (France); the Mudam, Luxembourg (Luxembourg); the Fundacio Caixa, Palma de Mallorca (Spain); the Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes (France); the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC (USA); The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, New York (USA); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. (USA); Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo (Norway); Arts Council England (UK); Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (UK); British Council, London (UK); Southampton City Art Gallery (UK); Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (UK); Warwick University Art Collection (UK); Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon (Portugal); Contemporary Art Society, London (UK); Albertina Museum, Vienna (Austria); FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand (France); Fundación Barrié, La Coruña (Spain); Government Art Collection, London (UK); Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (Germany); Jerwood Collection, London (UK); Leeds Museums and Galleries (UK); Musée départemental d'Art contemporain de Rochechouart, Haute-Vienne (France); Morsbroich Museum, Leverkusen (Germany); Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Centro Cultural de Belém Foundation, Lisbon (Portugal); National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia); Buffalo AKG Art Museum (USA).

Fiona Rae has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels, since 1994.

Paris Saint-Honoré

Fiona Rae

Messages

January 12 - March 9, 2024

Carole Benzaken

March 16 - May 18, 2024

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

Sophie Kuijken

January 20 - March 16, 2024

Laura Henno

April - June 2024

Brussels

Eugene James Martin

January 11 - March 16, 2024

Romana Londi

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