FEAST

2021 BFA Thesis Exhibition | Maeve Billings | Painting

www.maevebillings.com
BFA Statement

My paintings deal with the body. The forms I paint ooze through space, dragging tendrils of tissue and tumorous protrusions across the canvas. Fleshy moments shine in the light, as the slime glistens and sparkles. The painted forms appear to bulge and then recede, a writhing mass that immerses the viewer. The forms shift between abstract painterly moments and recognizable flesh. No longer individuals, they are more meat than person.
The paintings seek to devour the viewer, encompassing their field of vision. Densely packed with colors and brushstrokes, they reference the body through both illusionistic and material qualities, depicting sinew, muscle, soft tissue, and veins. In some places it feels like you can reach into the canvas to touch the painted flesh, and then moments of abstract painted mark break the illusion, bringing the viewer back to the understanding of the work through its materiality. We, the viewer and I, visually devour the painting and it swallows us as a result. Their looking becomes an act of simultaneous digestion. Sense of self starts to erode as we become lost. There is no start or end to the paint, nor easy resting place to hide from its overwhelming nature. Like stomach acid, the longer we sit with the work, the more we dissolve into it, losing any idea of up or down as we tumble through the composition.
The paintings deal with the body in three ways. Firstly, through the depiction of the body, with the colors and textures referencing flesh. Shiny highlights dance down muscle fibers-- colors referencing flesh-- and subtle pinks and yellows describe the delicate hues of skin stretched over meat. Secondly, they invite viewers to engage in the process by which they were made. Visible brushstrokes are an indexical trace of my own body and the process of making the work. They record the moment of their making, allowing a viewer to understand exactly how marks were laid down and, in turn, to place their own body into that understanding, projecting themselves into the paintings. Lastly, the physicality of the oil paint points back to its own fleshy nature in that way that it sweats, drips, and scabs across the canvas. The surface reminds us of the skin that covers our own bodies.

The paintings aren’t intentionally horrific but rather leverage these bodily depictions and references to engage viewers in the physicality of the paint and their own bodies. They invite visual joy in the experience of looking at paint, wrapped up in the abject remnants of body as subject matter. There is a push and pull between the repulsive nature of meat, and the attractive way in which it’s painted. This tension is intended to engage the viewer in a joyful experience of simultaneous looking and being.
Blood Orange

Oil on canvas, 40” x 50”, 2019-21
Extant

Oil on canvas, 48" x 60", 2019-21
Slaughtered Ox

Oil on canvas, 84” x 48”, 2018-21
Detail images of Slaughtered Ox
Detail images of *Slaughtered Ox*
Adam of My Labors

Oil on canvas, 54” x 72”, 2019-21
Detail images of Adam of My Labors
In The Flesh

Oil on canvas, 50” x 60”, 2020-21