

SARAH FAUX

Elisa Muscatelli, Interview to the artist Sarah Faux, The Blank, 29 October 2021



Detail of Sarah Faux, *Appearances*, 2021. Image courtesy of the artist.

Elisa Muscatelli: If you had to recount your artistic research to someone who encounters it for the first time, how would you describe it?

Sarah Faux: I paint people without clear boundaries, bodies that cannot be seen quickly because they've dissolved into fields of sensation.

EM: In your works important references, from Cubism to Schiele, up to Frankenthaler and Krasner, are easily identified and combined with a very pop color palette. Is there an artistic movement which you identify yourself and that has influenced you the most?

SF: I've spent a lot of time looking at painters who play with color perception, like Rothko's vibrating color fields or Bonnard's sleeping dogs hidden within passages of far-out optical mixing. I'm also indebted to artists who've embedded charged imagery into works that read overall as abstract, like Ghada Amer and Ellen Gallagher. But ultimately I'm a contemporary painter, chewing up and spitting out influences constantly, and more identified with my peers than with any 20th-century movement.

EM: After a few years of painting production, your cut-outs came out. They remind me a lot of a grown-up version of the '70s DIY paper dolls: how did you approach this stylistic practice? And how has your approach to the canvas changed?

SF: I've made cut-out pieces for at least 8 years now, and actually they predated my first painting shows. I made them to help me organize my thoughts and my oil paintings, which were really ambiguous at the time and weren't conjuring up bodily experiences as much as I wanted them to. Drawing from life and then making cut-outs of the forms I recorded really helped me to see that our physical bodies look very abstract already. So if I wanted to create paintings about abstract feelings, I realized that I didn't need to obscure the figure so much as I just needed to reveal the figure's weird, shifty, inherently abstract nature.

EM: You have described the production phase of the paintings as a thoughtful process, that needs a long executive time, that dialogues perfectly with a narrative tendency but at the same time is in contrast with an instinctive and abstract doing that characterizes it. I was wondering how these two

components manage to dialogue giving life to the visual description of a body which is, by its nature, in constant changing.

SF: I think you're asking about the inner and outer life of a person. The body is one of the only things we experience from both inside and outside, so I always want to keep those elements in tension within my work - exterior narrative experiences and inner unnameable sensations. So I start my paintings with an image composition in mind, like let's say a couple grinding on each other with their elbows sticking out in awkward opposing triangles. Then I'll pull colors, forms and shifting materiality to the forefront just enough to let that glimpse at the couple slip away. I go back and forth until I strike the balance that scratches my own itch.

EM: Color seems to be a central part of your artistic practice and more generally of your theoretical interest, in fact, one of the books that particularly struck you is Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*, in which blue is at the center of a subjective and philosophical meditation. What is your approach to color? Do you think it has a certain type of spirituality that you use on a symbolic level?

SF: I remember learning about pigments in college, and realizing there was really specific language for small differences between the variations of one hue, like for example blue - cobalt, cerulean, ultramarine, prussian, indigo, etc. The thrill of playing with those subtle differences has never worn off. Color relationships trigger intense sensations for me, both feelings like longing or joy, and also synesthetic responses like sexual desire or a distinct temperature (i.e. heat). Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* does justice to the complexity of the color blue in a way that I feel incredibly grateful for. As for my own approach to color, I don't see it as symbolic because every color is too shifty to symbolize any one thing. But I feel that shiftiness profoundly, in the same way, I feel my physical and emotional worlds always shifting, fragmented, never forming a static whole.

EM: In the contemporary art scene there is a lot of talk about avatars, A.I. and digital alter ego that are used as an extension of one's body within a digital reality capable of emancipating itself from the physical and moral limits of everyday reality. It is interesting to note how your works share this desire for body extension, although with a very different language. I would like to know how you approach this thematic.

SF: That's an interesting parallel to draw. I think of my paintings as perceptual puzzles much more than I think about them containing nameable characters or avatars. But the desire to transcend the confines of the self is very much present in my work. Often, I orient my paintings from an up-close, first-person point of view to make the piece into an extension of the viewer's body.

EM: The expressive freedom, especially when it comes to sexuality, of women has always had to compromise with the surrounding society. You talked about a force that comes from buried anger and the need to overturn the male pain (point?) of view. Do you believe that art should take on this ethical responsibility towards the new generations?

SF: Yes, but not necessarily directly. I don't think art needs to illustrate 'ethical values'. At the same time, my paintings are loose, sloppy, and sexual, because I want to pull viewers into a loose headspace that's free of certain hang-ups. There's an ethical core to that impulse. The bodies in my work betray their boundaries because those confines are limiting. The verbal, narrative world is limiting. Bringing people into a headspace where gender and desire are as shifty as color, that feels liberating.