

Stephen Polatch *The Beloved Color. The Hateful Color.*

Margot Samel is pleased to announce *The Beloved Color. The Hateful Color.*, a solo exhibition by Stephen Polatch (b. 1990, London, UK). The title of the artist's second solo exhibition with Margot Samel derives from a song cycle of Franz Schubert's from 1823, based on 20 poems by Wilhelm Müller, *Die schöne Müllerin*. In these poems a young traveler pines for a miller's daughter who favors a suitor dressed in green. An obsession with this color is born from his heartbreak and he is left to anguish in the countryside seeing his loss in the green hills he once loved. Made over the course of the past two years, both in the studio and en plein air, Stephen Polatch's works playfully grow from the poetic drama. His subjects merge with nature, wander through rivers, court each other among green ribbons of trees and lakes, reflect over sunsets, and enjoy times where both very much and nothing at all happens. The bodies of water threaded throughout the exhibition are made from dappling brushstrokes that mimic the classical piano of this title score and a gentle tension between inside and outside spaces echo the artist's own mediation between the focus of the studio and the pull of the outside world.

In a figurative series of works Polatch imagines his subjects musing in and out of moments of rest, idly engaging with the world as it passes through them. Depicting exchanges between humanity and nature is a common theme among both the works presented and his greater practice. As streams of water swirl between couples, night skies engulf them overhead. There is a purposeful and strange ambiguity to this effect. Polatch often begins his paintings as repetitive drawings of motifs he is attracted to from his studio. Letting the forms determine their meaning, separating themselves from their primary signifiers, aligns his practice with systematic and automatic processes used by early twentieth-century Surrealists. His grasp on pattern and decoration however softens the former movement's harder refusal of the dominant world. Polatch isn't interested in a refusal, in fact, his interest lies in the proximity of his subjects to the viewer and the intimacy this engenders in his works. Can you take a common subject, something near cliché, and treat it with deep sincerity—really take it seriously, and trust it still has something to teach you? Polatch's work is a satisfying answer, where expanded worlds delight in the joys and mysteries of their making.

In contrast, and as resistance to the isolation of the studio, Polatch has included a series of works painted plein air around London. In a challenge to escape some of the repetition that does reveal itself within the artist's work, he takes to sites where human and nature collide in bizarre and interesting ways. Sometimes these find paths back into his paintings, such as in his study of the Barbican Estate, a Brutalist-style architectural landmark from 1965, which reappears in *Water Garden*, and *Barbican Couple*. In plein air, Polatch finds himself kin to the protagonist in Schubert's songs. Reflecting over the green water at the Barbican ponds, he is lost to green as it evokes the clichés of a 'Sunday painter.' Monotony seems to consume his palette, and infest its way into all other surrounding tones. At the same time, he is devout to the green he sees around him— it

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is vast and diverse, dappled all around London's parks and it pulls people out into public spaces. It reminds its inhabitants they too exist in an uncanny natural world.

—Emily Small

Stephen Polatch (b. 1990, London, UK) lives and works in London, UK. Polatch received his BFA from at The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford, UK in 2013, and went on to study at the Royal Drawing School in London. Recent solo exhibitions include: *The Beloved Color. The Hateful Color.*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2024); *Swan-Road*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2022), and *Clyde*, Soft Opening, London, UK (2022). Recent group exhibitions include: *The Amber Room: Sticking up for Soft*, Cedric Bardawil, London, UK (2024); *The Middle Voice*, Shtager&Shch, London, UK (2024); *In Three Acts*, Huxley-Parlour, London, UK (2023); *Doing Time*, South Parade, London, UK (2023); *Pop Girls Run Riot*, 105 French Street, Glasgow, UK (2023); *Even a cat can look at the queen*, Mrs, Maspeth, NY (2022); *Viscereal*, Althuis Hofland Fine Arts, Amsterdam, NL (2022); *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Yee Society, Hong Kong (2022); *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2022); *Prestwick II*, New Glasgow Society East, Glasgow, UK (2022); *Peepers*, K Halstead, London, UK (2021); *A Many Voiced Argument with Life*, Glasgow International/Market Gallery, Glasgow, UK (2021); *Prestwick*, New Glasgow Society East, Glasgow, UK (2021); *The Amber Room II*, Amber Room, London, UK (2020); *Eigenheim*, Soft Opening, London, UK (2020); *Graven Images*, New Glasgow Society, Glasgow, UK (2019); *Drawings of Iasi*, Iasi, RO (2019); *Bilder*, New Glasgow Society, Glasgow, UK (2018), and *Unsweet House*, Unit 42, Glasgow, UK (2017).

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