

BAERT GALLERY 1923 S SANTA FE AVENUE LOS ANGELES CA 90021  
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MELINDA BRAATHEN

*Currents*

March 26 – April 30, 2022

Baert Gallery is pleased to present *Currents*, an exhibition of new work by Melinda Braathen.

In both her paintings and drawings, Braathen seamlessly transitions between elements of skillful figuration and expressively ambient abstraction. This blending of genres, traditions, and technique imbues her work with a unique sensibility that melds close observation of nature and human dynamics with theatricality and acute emotional attunement. Braathen's work stills and materializes the flux of life's constant becoming into a bodied abstraction of meditative paint swirled in masterful grooves of balanced coloration.

The works in the show stem from the artist's intention to utilize paint's unique properties to freeze and transform moments of daily life so as to showcase the hidden properties and sensory currents running through their fiber. *The way they formed brief churches over the table as he searched for the right words* is inspired by a line from the poet Ocean Vuong's collection *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*. Here, the man seen on the right side of the painting is depicted struggling to form his thoughts or express something in just the right way, while his tablemates are engaged and listening in various degrees of attunement. The figure in the middle is fully occupied and is thus submerged in a blue, white, and yellow energetic pattern, to the extent that only its hand and the outline of its head can be clearly distinguished. The woman seated to the figure's right (our left), meanwhile, is disengaged, and thus not buttressing the discussion at all, surrounded by her own distinct coloristic aura. "I am interested in exploring how a deeper kind of engaged listening can create brief and invisible architecture—the one we can feel but not necessarily see," Braathen notes of the painting.

Voyaging into both real and psychic wilderness along with the subjects of her paintings, Braathen subverts the traditional figure-ground relationship, questioning the boundaries of sovereign personhood and the living environment.

*In time, In tempo (After Tarkovsky's Stalker)* and *Some sweetness or sharpness in the air (After Tarkovsky's Stalker)* borrow their compositions from stillled frames of Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 eponymous film. In the film, a Stalker is someone especially skilled in guiding others into forbidden and mysterious zones of alien fauna where nature has ceased to behave in biologically predictable ways. *In time, In tempo* captures a moment in the narrative where the protagonist kneels in high vegetation and finds stillness, connecting with the Zone's sui generis landscape. To this view Braathen adds depictions of real-life medicinal flowers and herbs known for their curative properties, such as borage and echinacea to insinuate the plants' hidden life force, and their ability to communicate and interact with human organisms. That concern with the flowing forces and invisible auratic currents—as well as painting's unique ability to embody, highlight, and engage them in composition—also runs through *Some sweetness or sharpness in the air*. In this work, the forbidden Zone travelers are depicted in subdued exhaustion, simultaneously respectfully probing their surroundings for their reactions and submitting to them. "I'm exploring and playing with the ways our psychology affects our environment," Braathen notes of the piece, "The yellow 'force' moves through and around the figures. It is unclear if they feel it or sense it, but the surrounding environment is noticeably transforming, and their own contours are shifting and blurring with it".

Similarly, in works like *Skogen* and *Mornings that remember sunsets* Braathen creates richly layered landscapes that seem to exist at the borderline between dream, extrasensory perception, and real life. For the artist, drawing from nature is a way of bridging these elements in a single, unified space: a way to body forth the reality of the world that is often far stranger and more intense and alive than our best thoughts can ever reach, while addressing the frightening unpredictability and the constantly shifting essence of our reality. Based on a single photograph taken by the artist of a forest bathed in sunlight, this large-scale painting gives form to currents that manifest through nature in its unadulterated state. Braathen was originally struck by the vitality and kaleidoscopic richness of the depicted scene's reverberating sunlight. In creating the piece, she had first deliberately decolorized the original photo, and after meticulously transferring

the contours of the landscape to canvas, filled it anew with more emotionally and psychologically charged, strikingly radiant colors, highlighting the richness and density of living landscape's suspended motion through its expressive solidification in paint.

Melinda Braathen (b. 1985, Oslo, Norway) lives and works in Los Angeles. She has studied painting at the New York Studio School and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Bard College. Her works have been exhibited in galleries both nationally and internationally including Baert Gallery, Los Angeles; Untitled Art, Miami Beach OVR; Eastside International, Los Angeles; Last Projects, Los Angeles; Coaxial Gallery, Los Angeles; Kwadrat, Berlin, Germany; Masterworks Foundation, Bermuda.