

# Unstable Natures

By Sophie J Williamson

Sasha Ferré's studio is nestled amongst the Parisian urban sprawl. Looking out from the large windows unfolds the angular lines of the surrounding light industrial estate; concrete and steel beams criss-crossing the sightlines, eventually dissipating into the overcast grey of the city's March skies beyond. Amongst this inhospitable environment, greenery struggles to claim its space. The 'green-roofs' of the neighbouring building, that she has been watching hopefully across the courtyard since they were planted a few years ago, are listless. Yet the slow growth of these meagre plants, reluctantly rooting in the asphalt and shale, hold the only faint tinge of green amongst the grey urban expanse. Turning inwards to the studio, Ferré instead creates a cacophony of the life on the studio floor. Here the whole spectrum of greens vie for attention; illuminous limes scratch up against punchy pea-greens, dampened mosses against deep olives and emeralds, punctuated by effervescent yellows and pinks. Colours swirl in and out of organic forms, perhaps leaves, branches, stems, roots, but always on the move to something else. For Ferré, painting is a living metabolism. Her paintings throng with connective tissues, alive with vascularities; interconnected relationships that in places nurture one another, and in others create tensions. The canvas is both a mirror that reflects the becoming of the natural worlds and an organic world in itself, coming into being.

Direct and unmediated, her paintings are not formed with preliminary sketches or planned beforehand, instead they intuitively form themselves in relationship with the artist. Avoiding using brushes or solvents, and working on unstretched linen spread out on the floor, she works intimately in collaboration with her materials, opting to paint with the soft sensuality of oil sticks made of natural beeswax, pigments and linseed oil. Working into the oil stick lines by hand, her fingertips bruise, muddy and interfere delineations between colour, disavowing edges and warping them into symbiotic rhythms. The vibrant, deep colours seep into one another, refusing separation, in an energetic reverberation. By doing so she instigates a kind of entropy; dissolving boundaries, an energy of possibilities emanates. As Andreas Weber describes in *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology*, the living world is a

constant conversion of one thing into another, leading to inexorable new growth. Here this liveness of matter and its erotic entanglement is played out on the canvas; the artist's hand a collaborator in a community of interaction.

“There is only one immutable truth: No being is purely individual; nothing comprises only itself. Everything is composed of foreign cells, foreign symbionts, foreign thoughts. This makes each life-form less like an individual warrior and more like a tiny universe, tumbling extravagantly through life like the fireflies orbiting one in night. Being alive means participating in permanent community and continually reinventing oneself as part of an immeasurable network of relationships.”

— Andreas Weber, *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology*

For Ferré, by forming relations, touch creates meaning. Explaining her working process, Ferré describes working on the floor as a stage for a universal attraction; ‘bodies are attracted to the earth’. Grounded, and embracing the gravitational forces at play on herself and her materials, an intimate relationship unfolds in the painting’s making. ‘The improvised choreography I am performing when I’m painting can be compared to two bodies making love, in a way’. With no preconceived plan, painting becomes a play of call and responses. The process is fundamentally a sensual one, as energies cycle from matter to mind, and vice-versa, and onwards to other matters and other minds. The paintings pulse with unconcluded liveness; holding open a continued trajectory of transformation as colour and line seep into new forms, they hold themselves in a permanent state of intimate flux and sensual dialogue.

As each painting flows into the next, they remain constantly in the present. One of the first painting courses Ferré ever undertook was with traditional Chinese ink painting; is it a technique that is instant, capturing the Qi – or the life force – in the gesture. These techniques of ‘nowness’ continue to play out in her committed working style. The individual painting as an object sits in stark contrast to Ferré’s painting practice, which is imbued in this flow and flux, a holistic whole which cannot so easily be delineated and defined by a single stretched canvas. Each painting cannot be considered separately from the others, or from the painting of other artists, or from the rest of the material of the world. For her this conflict and contradiction is resolved in the analogy of cells in an organism: bounded by a

membrane, differentiating it from its neighbour, they nevertheless maintain porosity. Exhibition, studio, canvas and artists become an organism or biome, feeding and sustaining one another: *painting as meta organism*. The paintings continue to take on new roles once they depart from the studio. And as atoms in quantum entanglement, individual paintings remain in inseverable dialogue and relationship with one another even once separated.

Even the planets most remote environments are in constant dependant dialogue with humanities colonisation of the biosphere. Rather than depicting nature as we commonly perceive it, Ferré allows intuition to invent a new, wilder one, unconfined by human ecostructures and manipulated ecologies. Trying to escape our preconceived perception of what nature can or should be, she avoids portraying anything too close to a recognizable form. Her organic cacophonies remain raw and in a fluid state, unresolved and dissolve into one another. They are fertile; abundant possibility. The suggestions of climbing veins, reaching stems, arches of leaves or curvatures of petals that creep over the canvases are indeterminate and in a process of reforming; perhaps ghosts of past organic lives or whispers of futures ones, and very possibly both. Alive with electrifying colour, the dense, lush growth meshes into one another, and itself, evoking the forests and jungles of dreamscapes, psychedelic visions or the mystic imagination. As Tim Ingold questions, why should reality be separated from our imagining of it? Instead, he suggests a practice of imagining for the real, where an imagined landscape 'is a landscape not of being but of becoming: a composition not of objects and surfaces but of movements and stillness, not there to be surveyed but cast in the current of time.' This autopoiesis is played out on each of Ferré's canvas', where an unknown vegetal wildness is in an ongoing state of *becoming*, bringing itself into the world.