

Judy Millar
«Questions I have asked myself»
September 3rd – October 15th, 2022

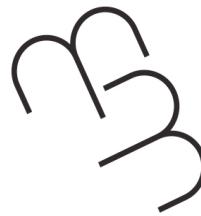
*the visual limits
of now you see it
now you don't*

where is the edge of vision?

In hardly any other field than the arts are our (human) limits of perception, consciousness, and comprehension so ceaselessly explored and challenged. It is the artistic search for those very liminal experiences which are able to transport us to different, previously unknown places – places of the in-between, places of the other, places of the “unthinkable”. Ultimately, artists seem to have always been driven by a desire to expand our horizons and “bring together things outside of normal classifications, and glean from these affinities a new kind of knowledge which opens our eyes to certain unperceived aspects of our world and to the unconscious of our vision.”² In some cases, the artistic quest to find these places becomes a crucial part of the approach and of the work itself. They create specific spaces and places based on our shared reality, yet challenging and expanding it at the same time: simultaneously real and unreal spaces, spaces that overturn or transform the everyday – or in other words: heterotopias. The French philosopher and writer Michel Foucault outlines the notion of heterotopia to describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces.³ According to Foucault, heterotopias can be “real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”⁴ They are places and spaces that are in different ways separate worlds within our world, mirroring and yet distinguishing themselves from what is outside. What characterizes them is a separation from and a tension with the remaining quotidian space, but in the sense of correlations or resemblances. From this point of view, the work of Judy Millar is as much a heterotopic microcosm as it is a painterly counter-site. At Galerie Mark Müller, the New Zealand painter takes us to various intangible site of escape, containment, rest, pleasure and transformation by exploring our edge of vision.

every attempted annihilation of the image makes it richer

Six large-scale paintings from the past two years come together in the gallery's main room. Shifting between soft pastel tones and rich violet, blue, and yellow hues, a connecting element is constituted by the ribbons and lines stretching searchingly across the surface of each painting. Like a snapshot of an endlessly moving shadow, the colors applied in part directly by hand bring the duality of Judy Millar's artistic undertaking into focus: on the one hand, the acrylic and oil paints are clearly visible due to their tangible materiality, as is the canvas as a given and confined image carrier. The paint and its layering are thus traceable and sometimes even addressed in works such as *Untitled – Paintover* (2020). The paintings are clearly set within a material reality that neither conceals nor masks the fact that they are “made”. On the other hand, both color and canvas are a means to an end that allows the artist to enter a world of illusion, a second reality, in which she confronts us with the works' incredible depth and irrepressible pull. The painterly gestures seem to reach beyond the edges of the canvas and take on a life of their own. At the same time, each



gesture serves a careful attempt to question what is actually visible (and what is not), as Millar seeks to obscure, conceal, and annihilate. Color, too, has a dual function since it serves as both a medium and a mood of sorts. In this respect, the hues and nuances of color evoke an atmospheric or affective tipping point: on a temporal level, by recalling the moment of dusk or dawn for instance, as well as spatially, as an in-between space oscillating between material fact and elusive dream.

I am a painter except when I am painting, then I am no-one, no-where, nothing

The exhibition title is borrowed from the eponymous publication, which brings together Judy Millar's key works from the past forty years as well as notes and drawings from her workbooks. The written excerpts and thoughts that she shares in this catalogue express the exceptional "push and pull" of her thinking and ideas. This tension is just as inherent in her paintings: they convey what is probably one of the most fundamental contradictions of humankind, since we both exist corporeally and inhabit a mental, fictitious world at the same time. It is precisely on this threshold between materiality and illusion, the known and the unknown, the familiar and the new, that Millar explores the visible and the invisible realms through her work. Her paintings are thus able to conjure a heterotopic counter-site or a placeless place, so to speak, that brings together two colliding realities. The artist herself might describe this place as "no-where". But even nowhere is indeed somewhere.

Marlene Bürgi

¹The following quotes are excerpts from the catalog published in 2021 entitled "Questions I Have Asked Myself" by Judy Millar, which not only gives its name to the exhibition at Galerie Mark Müller, but is an important point of reference.

²Georges Didi-Huberman, *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back*, Exh.cat. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2010.

³Although the concept of heterotopia is highly contested, some theorists have explored it, while acknowledging its incompleteness and lack of clarity. In this particular context, it serves as a possibility to converge two independent spheres – an actual site (the painting as such and its materiality) and a counter-site (the world of painterly illusion and fantasy) in order to become a namable entity. Michel Foucault writes and talks about heterotopias on three different occasions between 1966 and 1967. The most well-known explanation of the term is given in a lecture entitled "Des Espace Autres" in March 1967 to a group of architects. See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", in: *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, 1984.

⁴Foucault 1984, 3. Moreover, Foucault describes a bewildering set of examples, including utopian communities, ships, cemeteries, brothels, museums, prisons, gardens of antiquity, fairs and many more.