

HYPERALLERGIC

The Pleasures of Slow Looking

Jule Korneffel is not after denial in her paintings but rather affirmation, even in these chaotic, seesawing times.

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Jule Korneffel, "Monet's Shadow" (2021), acrylic on canvas, 30 x 24 inches (all images courtesy Spencer Brownstone Gallery)

Initially inspired by Mary Heilmann's seemingly casual approach to abstraction, Jule Korneffel has moved steadily deeper into her own territory. In her debut exhibition at Spencer Brownstone in March 2019, Korneffel told Jamie Martinez in *Arte Fuse* that she was after a "calm joy." Her paintings consisted of thinly layered matte grounds on which she made a circular gesture, either as a quickly drawn, loaded line or as an irregular circular shape. One of the striking things about these paintings was that earlier shapes and previous grounds peered through the surface, inviting the viewer to look into the paint, as well as take notice of the layers and color relationships. The paintings were simultaneously informal and slow to reveal themselves. In contrast to Heilmann, whose color choices often are derived from pop and vernacular culture, such as the yellow-centric palette of *The Simpsons* and the bright colors of a Mexican serape, Korneffel's sources are less namable.

In [Jule Korneffel: Here comes the night](#) at Spencer Brownstone (February 26–April 16, 2022), her second with this gallery, the artist's palette has become dark, somber, and moody. Jettisoning the joyous palette of her first show, with its pinks and pale blues, these new works are dominated by blacks, grays, dark greens, and rust reds. But to my mind, it is not just the palette that Korneffel has changed. If the lines and shapes in her first show were clear, and there was a sense of stability to the work, these paintings seem to be about fleeting glimpses and ghostly presences.



Jule Korneffel, "Another Tragic Moment in History (Detail of a Flower Still Life)" (2021), acrylic on canvas, 108 x 80 inches

At one point, while looking at "Another Tragic Moment in History (Detail of a Flower Still Life)" (2021), which is nine feet tall and more than six feet wide (the largest work by the artist that I have seen), I was reminded of sitting in front of Ad Reinhardt's *Black Paintings*. At the same time, this association in no way diminishes Korneffel's paintings, which reject abnegation and Reinhardt's denial of the hand's role in painting. Korneffel is not after denial but rather affirmation, even in these chaotic, seesawing times. In her implicit rejection of Reinhardt, she recognizes that she does not have to be as circumscribed in her palette as he was to make inviting paintings rooted in perceptual nuance.

On the left side of "Another Tragic Moment in History (Detail of a Flower Still Life)," directly above the irregular, dark red, gestural orb, a larger, green-tinted orb softly pulses in the blackish ground, through which more green peeks on the other side of the painting. This barely perceptible orb is at once hardly differentiated from what is around it and unmistakably itself. Our inability to fix the spectral forms slows down our looking, making me wish that the gallery had provided a bench that I could sit on as I sank slowly into the painting.

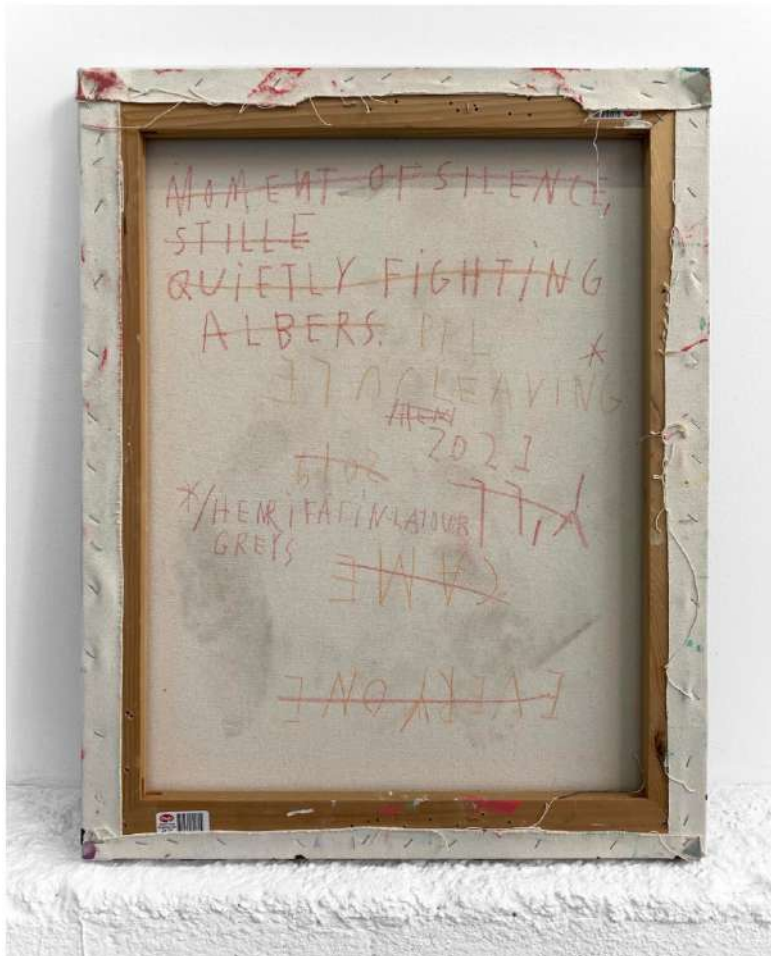


Jule Korneffel, "Ppl Leaving (Fantin-Latour Blues)" (2021), acrylic on canvas, 30 x 24 inches

Is the dark red shape in the lower left side the "Another Tragic Moment in History" the detail of a flower still life that Korneffel refers to in the title? If so, what is the dark world it inhabits but our present, marked by constant conflicts and tribalism? And yet, rather than becoming cynical, the artist adheres to her belief in art, specifically abstract painting.

Just as she initiated a dialogue with Heilmann in her earlier work, in this exhibition she calls out to various artists, in both her titles and the record she keeps on the back of her paintings. On the back of the painting "Ppl Leaving (Fantin-Latour Blues)" (2021), Korneffel has written and crossed out "Moment of Silence, Still Quietly Fighting Albers." A large blue circle floats in the painting's upper left-hand corner, against a layered ground dominated by an unnamable color that seems to be a mixture of blue, green, and gray. Faint streaks of red peer through, accentuated by a small red daub of a brushstroke in the painting's upper right corner and a small mitten-like shape floating just above the bottom edge, near the lower right-hand corner. For all the nuances of color, layering of different hues, small and large forms and touches, nothing seems forced.

As I see it, Korneffel has aligned herself with color abstraction, and with artists who believed that color was more than surface description. In tandem with her exploration of color relationships, she is interested in the interplay between materiality and immateriality, the solid and the ephemeral.



Jule Korneffel, back of "Ppl Leaving (Fantin-Latour Blues)" (2021)

In "Monet's Shadow" (2021), the three shapes we see in the painting convey the most obvious change that her work has undergone since her debut show at this gallery. In the earlier work, the shapes did not distinguish themselves from each other as they do in the recent work. Against a brushy, streaked ground of dark green and black, Korneffel has made a tan brushstroke on the upper right side. Below it is a porous, dry violet circle. On the painting's left side is an irregular black shape that can be read as some kind of portal or evocation of absence. The difference in every application of the brush and in the density of the paint held this viewer's attention, as each attained a particular identity in a seemingly offhand way. This struck me as fresh, tender, and open.

The dance between restraint and audacity, austerity and material lushness, is integral to the slow looking these paintings quietly insist upon. At a time when entertainment and distraction have become a large part of the art world's presentations, Korneffel's belief in paint and painting, the relationship between the optical and interiority, underscore her rejection of the different overarching narratives regarding abstraction. Rather than connecting herself to a theory, she has pursued the thoughtful pleasures that only a painting, its combination of the visual and the physical, can embody.



Jule Korneffel, back of "From Vuillard with Love (Rome 1996)" (2021), acrylic on canvas, 79 x 63 inches

[Jule Korneffel: Here comes the night](#) continues at *Spencer Brownstone Gallery* (170-A Suffolk Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through April 16. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.