VIBRANT MATTER

curated by Jesi Khadivi

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What is a thing but a succession of congealed moments? Things are not mere matter, but a nexus of relations born not of appearances but motion. When thinking about "things"—how they circulate, how we consume them, how we produce them, and how they make meaning—I can't help but fixate on the notion of the "high-touch surface" as a reclamation of all the stories, all the moments, that a thing encounters. Something highly-touched, whether a thing, a history, or an idea, is an invitation to inhabit a state of multiplicity, not as an abstraction, but as a lived experience: a swarm of vitalities. "Objects," the cultural theorist W.J.T. Mitchell writes, "are the way things appear to a subject—that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template. Things, on the other hand, … [signal] the moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can looks back, when the mute idol speaks, when the subject experiences the object as uncanny […]." This layer of latent animacy pervades the works assembled in *Vibrant Matter*. Inspired by Jane Bennett's canonical book of the same name—which proposes that matter is never merely inert or passive but possessed of its own vitality—the exhibition takes an oblique approach to the notions of "vitality" and "thing-power," veering away from a focus on the vital properties of materials alone to encompass intuitive, affective, and embodied dimensions of that encounter.

Edith Dekyndt builds her practice around the hidden life of everyday materials, attending to what matter does when set into motion by the simplest of gestures. Working with found and humble substances, she enters into what she has described as a "slow choreography" with her materials: neither dominating nor surrendering to them, but attending carefully to what they do on their own terms. Janaina Tschäpe's xpansive abstract compositions emerge entirely from the artists observations, memories, and fantasies, functioning as luminous inner landscapes in which the boundaries between real and imagined spaces dissolve. Tschäpe doesn't so much control her surfaces as negotiate with them. Her practice of layering, in which each mark partially conceals the last, operates as a form of sedimentation in which the past is never fully erased but remains active beneath the surface. or Tschäpe, is an extension of both hand and mind: a porous threshold between observation, memory, and the materiality of paint itself.

Lena Henke's ceramic works stage encounters between the bodily and the botanical, the human and the animal. Her forms collapse boundaries, hovering in the uncanny threshold Mitchell describes: neither fully one thing nor another, always looking back. For Henke, the productive friction between artist and material extends into the social body—form is always already shaped by cultural and social forces that exceed individual intention and resist resolution. Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili views the photograph as a "boundary problem," a medium that collapses the distinctions between bodies, images, and definitions. Rather than freezing a moment in time, her work posits photography as "an open process of developing and revealing," one in which the tactile quality of the image is as significant as its subject. Deliberately intervening in her negatives using razor blades and slivers, Alexi-Meskhishvili leaves traces of the hand that damage and transform the photographic material into "fugitive testimonies": images that are contingent vulnerable, hovering between the bodily and the abstract. Across these four practices, the hand is never absent—it presses, scratches, staples, molds—leaving its trace in surfaces that push back, accumulate, and exceed what was intended. This is what a highly-touched surface offers: an open encounter with all that matter carries and refuses to relinquish.

Jesi Khadivi