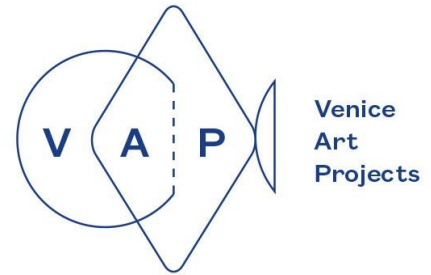


be gentle with me. sii gentile con me

Lily Moebes



opening on the 22nd of November

curated by Ameli M. Klein, in collaboration with Yasmine Helou and Venice Art Projects

“Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge.”

— Audre Lorde

be gentle with me. sii gentile con me is Brooklyn-based artist Lily Moebes' most comprehensive exhibition to date, featuring a wide range of textile-based formats including painting, sculpture, and installation.

The title of the exhibition is taken from her recent piece, *sii gentile con me*, a work on canvas composed of reclaimed Italian silk and wool fabrics, embroidery, and paint. It is through the subtle change in intonation that Moebes shifts the intention of the phrase: *be gentle with me* as an internal plea towards oneself to be kind with themselves, or towards the other, addressing our surroundings and beyond. Created during the first episode of quarantine and isolation, the request to be gentle is closely related to the artist's deep engagement with care, as evident in the embroidery on the piece stating *you are not allowed to talk to me like that*. It is this very notion of the “Skin” as the “cultural border between self and world” as Claudia Benthien formulates it, that can be found throughout Moebes artistic practice. How can we protect ourselves from a neverending onslaught of polarizing new, populist agendas and increasingly hostile echo chambers of self-righteousness?

It is David Graeber that further problematized the vulnerability that kindness allows, as “generations of political manipulation have finally turned that sense of solidarity into a scourge. Our caring has been weaponized against us.” But how do we create boundaries without compromising compassion?

It is this tension between fragility and strength that is echoed in the artist's treatment of textile: lightly layered white paint to create an illusion of delicate lace is in direct juxtaposition to stiffly constructed ruffles that are spilling over seemingly solid canvas surface - delicate stitching coexists with broad, paint-soaked pieces of fabric to create a tactile, opulent surface. Moebes carefully constructs a layered, multi-dimensional surface that is further worked with paint and embroidery, creating an ornamental, almost baroque sculptural quality.

It is this interdependence of textile and paint, treated as alike materials in an effortless assemblage that, elevates the material on canvas as no longer a mere carrier medium of oil paint, but an equal component to the work. Though expanding on her mixed media practice, Moebes continues her deep engagement with the body, its gesture, and expression, depicting fragmented body parts such as arms, though circumventing the omnipresent notion of the fragmented body as a representation of physical violence. The artist rather evokes Linda Nochlin as she “firmly believes that the fragment in visual representation must be treated as a series of discrete, ungeneralizable situations” in her publication *The Body in Pieces. The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*. Hence, rather than focusing on the violence of a disjointed whole, it is a close look at individual appendages, isolated gestures, and lost sentences. It is the emotionality within a body’s gesture that allows for non-spoken communication: evoking Audre Lorde’s declaration that “Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge” Moebes works opens a tender context, a space to re-negotiate our need for kindness, from ourselves and others.

Endnotes:

Sara Ahmed: *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*

Leora Auslander: *Deploying material culture to write the history of gender and sexuality: the example of clothing and textiles*

Elisabeth Grosz: *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*

Linda Nochlin: *The Body in Pieces. The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*

Julia Kristeva and John Lechte: *Approaching Abjection*