

MELINDA BRAATHEN ATMOSPHERE

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Baert Gallery is pleased to present *Atmosphere*, the gallery's second solo exhibition of works by Melinda Braathen on view from 24 February to 30 March. In her new oil paintings, Braathen commandeers the liquidity of the medium to render atmospheric landscapes that transcend planes of existence.

The most elementary of interpretations may describe the paintings in this show as vibrant meditations on nature yet the artist's exploration is something much more intentional; evincing constantly shifting environments, where climate, material condition, and psychology are indulged over representational forms.

In this new series of works, the artist refers to a text by Gilles Deleuze in which he references Paul Cézanne's belief that "the painter must look beyond a landscape to its chaos ... to the point where one no longer sees forms or even matter, but only forces, densities, intensities." It is from this principle that Braathen's new body of work departs, reaching for an embodiment of the manifold definitions of atmosphere.

Most of the paintings in *Atmosphere* are large scale, their vastness an invitation to enter the psychic wilderness with our whole body and experience the sources of heat, movement, textures, and force of Braathen's space. She builds up the surface of her paintings with variegated gestural marks that bring out the recognisable qualities of the subject while alerting the viewer to the environment's protean forces. As such, both the painting process and the final work is transient, often feeling like it's about to break open, change, or begin to vibrate or radiate in unforeseen ways.

Each of the painted spaces in *Atmosphere* are overgrown to varying degrees. In *In Time, In Tempo* sprawling vegetation is depicted as if it were anthropomorphized, gutting an abandoned car, gluttony sweltering through the layers of paint. In these thriving ecosystems, Braathen expresses feelings of anxiety and anticipation. At the time of their production, she was at varying stages of pregnancy, a state of being that requires adaption to continuous changes. To accommodate new life, biological and creative transfor-

mations were made. Braathen converted to a non-toxic oil painting practice that used a fraction of her usual colour palette, instead relying on textural shifts, expressive mark making and layering to convey energy. Shifts in perspective also manifest in Braathen's references to paths. The 80x60 inch painting *Sound Chamber* of a mangrove forest in water holds various openings in its frame and is imagined by the artist as the unknown and anticipatory space that will open up to her after the delivery of her child.

The painting *Entwined* depicting a person crossing a body of water, holds a similar tension. Both the central figure and her surrounding environment share the same thermal colour palette; breathing, pulsating, and thriving in symbiosis. It leaves us begging the existential question: who is affecting who? Denying Cartesian measures of humans' relationship to nature, Braathen draws on Edward Munch's interest in inward and outward realities to inform her practice, utilising the human figure as a vehicle for emotional expedition. Oftentimes, she will channel an individual she knows who holds a deep, sustaining relationship with nature to her vistas in an attempt to access a more psychological palette.

As the sun casts her shadows over the canvas, mountainous plains morph into throbbing sea anemone, time speeds up and slows down, gusts of wind eddy thoughts and put them down again. The more surreal and atmospheric the landscape becomes, the more attentive Braathen is to nature's enchantment, transience, and unpredictability.

**Melinda Braathen** (b. 1985, Oslo, Norway) lives and works in Los Angeles. She earned her BFA from Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, US in 2007. Her upcoming and recent exhibitions include solo shows at Baert Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US (2024); *Charged Bodies*, Golsa, Oslo, Norway (2023); Alice Folker, Copenhagen, Denmark (2023); *Currents*, Baert Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US (2022). Her work is included in numerous private collections, including in the USA, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, Greece, Nigeria, and United Arab Emirates.