

DOUGLAS GORDON

Paradise

January 28 – March 27, 2021

Douglas Gordon's *Paradise*, his third solo exhibition with Dvir Gallery and his first at the gallery's Brussels location, is a rhythmic score of new paintings, in which vital images, their material support, and the technique that generates them are transformed into elastic apparitions unfolding in real time and space.

Gordon's new paintings utilise acetone printing to transfer provocative softcore images from early 1960s issues of *Playboy* magazine onto burnt, unlevelled, and asymmetrical canvases marked by biomorphic drips of wax, acrylic paint, and unknown liquids. The transfers dilute the visibility and definition of the images to the point they become a semi-transparent superfluous tissue evaporating through the interlaced threads of the canvas that both consumes and materialises them. The new paintings juxtapose the cyclical movement of time conducted by the intermittent appearance and disappearance of the images with a sense of change and extension implied by the vague contours and positions of the canvases and the flowing drips of wax and paint.

The unpredictable topography is further intensified when observing the mirror panels against which the canvases are placed. In almost every work segments of mirror exceed the unravelled edges of the canvas or are revealed through holes in the canvas. Incorporated into the topography of the works, the mirrors expose the backside of the images and canvases as well as reflecting the dynamic scenery in front of them. The mirrors unveil the void concealed within the works, the void they emerge from and are in danger of falling into. They create an illusion of an abysmal space behind the surface which lends the images the quality of an ex-nihilo, primal emergence. In addition, being an effect of a direct, simulatively magical transfer of an image onto a surface, Gordon's new paintings unavoidably allude to the legend of the veil of St. Veronica, the miraculous imprint of the face of Jesus Christ onto a cloth, and thus reveal their affinity to archetypical and primal models of image making.

Mirrors and fire is a persistent motif in many of Gordon's previous works, such as the ongoing series *Self Portrait of You + Me* (begun 2007). In this series, burnt remnants of Andy Warhol's Marylins and Jackies are attached to mirror panels of the same size, which temporarily capture portrait of the viewer in a sequential process of evocation and elimination. However, *Paradise* is the first time in which panels of black mirror are employed as the backdrop of some of the works. Gordon's black mirrors can be seen as references to a Claude glass, an optical device that has been used by painters throughout; an esoteric divination ritual aided by black mirrors, and the dark reflective screens of the digital communication devices we are surrounded by today.

Gordon's complicity in the cultural archive not only refolds the fabric of collective memories, but it also harnesses historical entities as aspects of his own biography and artistic practice. Consequently, *Paradise* reference to issues of *Playboy* from the early 1960s not only throws us back to the time of the sexual revolution, it also seeks to examine the scope of erotic imagery in the years prior to the artist's birth, the sexual climate in which his parents could have been drawn to conceive him. In light of this, the new cycle of work brings to mind Gordon's 1994 sound installation *Something Between my Mouth and Your Ear*, which consists of an enclosed blue room whose tonality shifts according to the time of day and the amount of light outside. The work's soundtrack is a selection of thirty songs listed in the charts between January and September 1966, songs Gordon's mother might have listened to while pregnant with him. It is the speculated playlist of his time in his mother's womb, as *Paradise* is the speculated erotic image of the time prior to his conception.

The notion of retroactive/future internalisation of the outer world is also manifested in the titles of the new paintings. Each of the works comprising *Paradise* is titled *Belongs to...* When sold, the gap is filled in and the name of the buyer becomes part of the title of the acquired work. As such, the works regain the status of a personalized experience, which, like the original issues of *Playboy* they stem from, establishes a close connection with one particular individual at a time.

Ory Dessau