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'All that kale' by Jule Korneffel - Interview in BOMB Magazine with Hannah Bruckmüller on 15 March 2021

'The Ongoing Present Moment of Making: Jule Korneffel Interviewed by Hannah Bruckmüller. Mark-making as internal landscaping.'

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Jule Korneffel, Honey Sugar Pop, 2019, acrylic, vinyl, gesso on canvas, 63 × 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Claas Reiss.

Jule Korneffel paints in order to transform direct, lived experience into poetry. Her current solo show, All that kale, at Claas Reiss in London is the German-born, Brooklyn-based artist's first in the UK. While spending an afternoon with her at the Strand Bookstore in New York City prior to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we both decided to buy Patti Smith's *Devotion*. Inspired by Smith's writings, in the interview that follows we discuss artistic devotion, the entanglements of personal life and artistic practice, and how memories become brushstrokes.

—Hannah Bruckmüller

Hannah Bruckmüller

You sent me this quote from Patti Smith's *Just Kids*: "I don't even know what I'm doing, but I can't stop doing it." What made you pick this sentence?

Jule Korneffel

I think that if you can't stop doing something, time is very precious. My painting requires a lot of my time, so in a way I never stop. As soon as I'm awake my mind is present similar to how Smith's quote mentions doing without knowing. Whether I'm washing dishes, doing office work, or working in the studio, to me painting is an ongoing present moment of making.

In *Just Kids*, I was very touched by Smith's way of writing: she is deeply empathetic, sensitive, and giving. And despite her ever-changing and complex lifestyle (I can sympathize!), she never stops writing or creating her art. It naturally arises as part of her being, proving you cannot stop being what you are.

HB

The idea of life as fuel for artistic creation also corresponds with Smith's writings and her careful delineations of personal anecdotes. Which memories most guide the path of your brush?

JK

My earliest memory is the voice and smell of my mother, which is a phenomenon I associate with a certain blue. As a child, the first thing I did in the morning was go work at my painting table and then wake my mother at 6:30-ish to show her what I'd done. From the start I was encouraged to do what I like, and to trust that.

I was also certainly inspired by my father who went straight to his math table every morning and was always completely engrossed in his work. He and I mainly communicated through equations and our weeklong chess games. Those abstract patterns and ways of thinking became profoundly familiar to me, and from early on I had a color for every number and geometric shape.



Jule Korneffel, *Clouds in April...*, 2019, acrylic, vinyl, gesso on canvas. 54 × 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Claas Reiss.

HB

I found Smith's full quote, and it is her saying to Robert Mapplethorpe: "'I don't even know what I'm doing,' I shrugged, 'but I can't stop doing it. I'm like a blind sculptor hacking away.'" I'm curious to hear what you have to say about "hacking away." What's your relation to the blank canvas?

JK

I do both hacking and adding, simultaneously. To start any painting I jump into the unknown with hardly any concept. Each one physically develops over time as I build layers of paint. The stretcher usually lies on the ground, and I scrub and massage the paint into the surface. I have self-made brushes on sticks so that I can reach anywhere easily. The somatic experience of painting takes me to another place and gives me a vehicle with which to explore. I need to give myself to it completely, for hours, losing sense of time. Then I might spend days, weeks, months looking at it, figuring it out, constantly on the way to new discoveries.

I also think Smith's "hacking away" can mean getting to the core of something beyond its physicality. It takes me to quantum physics and the idea that the deeper we explore materiality the more we get to a place out of matter and order. Remarkable that we know more all the time, but life itself still remains inexplicable!



Jule Korneffel, *Who gets the cherry?*, 2019, 13 × 12 inches, acrylic, vinyl, gesso on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Claas Reiss.

HB

You also point to direct life experiences in some of your titles. Would you introduce one of them?

JK

Let's talk about one that again relates to Smith and that's included in my current show: *Who gets the cherry?* (2019). While reading *Just Kids* I was reminded of the personal separation I went through shortly after I moved from Germany to New York in 2015. Like Smith and Mapplethorpe, it took us many years to entirely split. I finished this painting while finally giving in to this new emotional state. One new and interesting aspect of *Who gets the cherry?* is the openness of its white ground. In these areas the brushstroke is loose and earlier layers are seen. Atop are two rounded semi-transparent marks with an opaque red "cherry" mark standing in between them. In this way the cherry is division and an object of attraction too: something at which the other two are looking. The sides of this work also carry more marks than my paintings usually do, emphasizing the process and claiming objecthood more strongly than my other works. This relates back to the title *Who gets the cherry?* because in material terms I associate this painting with a thick piece of cake—Black Forest cake. A slice of this cake has so much cream that it's best shared as it's too heavy for one person alone. But at the end of eating it, there's only one cherry. While painting, it became evident that there's no perfect, easy way to separate from a person. Saying goodbye hurts; it is frightening, and there is no fairness to it. It's a long way to let someone go.

HB

I like this metaphor of the singleness of a pair, which indicates loss, even scarring, but also the pleasure of life—of sharing a piece of cake, even if only one person gets the cherry. What is your fascination with this geometrical form of a circle?

JK

No, no, no, I'm not painting circles! If I wanted to do that I would use a template. I did go through a period of intensely hard-edged, grid-based compositions, and I'm inspired by minimalist vocabulary and geometry. Yet my circle-like splotches mainly come from my process of intuitive scribbling. Not long ago, there were letters and numbers involved, but these somehow migrated to the backs and sides. These circle-like shapes remain, as I find them to be the simplest and purest mark for me. They are emotional footsteps: painting as tracing, showing that I've been here, here, and there—mark-making as internal landscaping.

HB

This reminds me of your 2019 solo show at Spencer Brownstone Gallery called here comes trouble for which you left a mark on the wall in the courtyard. Your paintings expanded outside. I wonder if there is a connection between the place and the pace of your painting. "I am a speedy painter," said Agnes Martin, who I know is an influence for you. What makes you paint faster or slower?

JK

When I am painting, I don't know what I'm doing at the present moment or what I'll do next. I paint about twenty paintings at the same time. Meanwhile, what stops me—forces me to take a break from the act of painting—is to constantly rearrange my studio!

I find it fascinating in Just Kids how simplified Smith's lifestyle is, which she has maintained to this day. Martin's was simple, too. Both survived poverty by holding on to their art. A minimal style of living was necessary in the beginning, but later on this lifestyle was consciously chosen. What they were doing couldn't be negotiated or compromised. I'm very thankful my heroes did all their work. I feel protected by their accomplishments and obliged to do my job and go beyond.

HB

One of my heroines is Hélène Cixous who coined the term *écriture féminine* in her wonderful text on Medusa's laughter. Cixous demands a self-reflexive, autobiographical practice: "Write your self. Your body must be heard."

JK

I can relate, because my artistic process derives from an internal dialogue.

HB

I find that your paintings allow for contemplation in that they allow one to see—to take the time to tune in to the color, to the brushstroke, and to the painting itself.



Exhibition view of Jule Korneffel: All that kale at Claas Reiss. Courtesy of Claas Reiss.

JK

Surely my paintings offer a fast and easy read; but, yes, they also offer that the viewer live them, layer by layer. It usually takes a long time to get a few marks in the right place, on the right ground. Some people think it's easy and that all I do is just spatter around for a couple of minutes, which is not entirely untrue. But I also alternate between execution and contemplation—it takes time, like getting to know a person. Maybe my paintings are like human beings; they've inherited the ability to slow down and sensitize. And to also reach beyond time.

Jule Korneffel: All that kale is on view at Claas Reiss in London until May 15.

Hannah Bruckmüller is an art historian and theoretician based in Vienna, Austria. She received a PhD on Marcel Broodthaers's publishing practice from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 2020. Prior, Bruckmüller was a doctoral fellow at the Austrian Academy of Sciences and a visiting scholar at Hunter College of the City University of New York where she met Jule Korneffel.