

Ross Bleckner

Commune

January 16 – March 1, 2025
Avenue Louise 430, 1050 Brussels

MARUANI MERCIER is pleased to present Ross Bleckner: *Commune*, the exhibition of new paintings by the artist, opening at the Brussels gallery on 16th January 2025. In *Commune*, delicate outlines of figures, plants, sinuous lines and colour fields seem flooded with light, as if briefly arising in our visual field from the iridescent dark ground. The compositions at times flicker in our perception, shifting from abstract shapes, to celestial bodies, to human heads. They are reflections on the possibility of communing with the external world and the importance of empathy with others during the moments of social and political turmoil. As the artist notes, “To commune with someone, to commune with something is the blending of you and something outside of yourself, something bigger than you. Hopefully that’s what’s being an artist, and that is what art is about.”

In *Two Meet Again*, radiant lines overlap and dance in space, configuring into an ethereal image of an encounter between two people. Ghost-like and transparent, the figures appear to float on the verge of recognition, suggesting a fleeting thought or a mental image of human relations. Part of an important series dedicated to the memory of a close friend of the artist, *Two Meet Again* is a meditation on the possibility of holding onto an image or a sense of presence of another over time. Intertwining with each other and with the outer network of lines, the figures are continually in a state of becoming, arising and disappearing, transcending the weight of loss through the awareness of the present moment.

For Bleckner, the soft focus of his compositions reflects the workings of the mind, now attentive, now oblivious. Considering the relationship between biological and psychic, cellular and celestial, the works in *Commune* interrogate the vulnerability of the human condition and humanity’s place in the natural order. In *What is the Grass*, the artist begins with a scan of the human brain, transforming the network of synaptic connections into an image which at once evokes a floral meadow and a constellation in space. Alternating between the micro and the macro, the composition embraces the complexity of systems that are beyond our understanding or control.

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As the artist remarked, “There is an ineffable quality of imagery that you can locate but it always slips through. Things aren’t in our control as we would like them to be, they have a fluid quality and they keep moving and changing. That’s a kind of Buddhist idea. This is something that we get used to either willingly or unwillingly - things change.”

Ross Bleckner (b. 1949, New York) is a prominent artist whose work has explored the fragility of life, particularly in the context of the AIDS crisis that gripped New York in the 1980s. His paintings are meditations on change, loss, and memory, with recurring themes of the body, health, and disease. As Bleckner himself put it, “The idea that the body is so perfect until it’s not perfect. It’s a fragile membrane that separates us from disaster.” This contemplation on life’s impermanence has made his art resonate deeply, whether through abstract stripes and dots or representational imagery of birds, flowers, and brains. His iconic multicoloured circles, or “cells,” smoothly layered on dark grey backgrounds, evoke the appearance of blood droplets or microscopic molecules, creating a hypnotic and disorienting effect.

Bleckner studied under Sol LeWitt and Chuck Close at New York University, earning a BA in 1971 and an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 1973, where he met David Salle. Upon returning to New York in 1974, Bleckner moved into a Tribeca loft that became a creative hub, shared with fellow artist Julian Schnabel and housing the Mudd Club, a popular gathering spot for musicians and artists. His early *Stripe* paintings of the 1980s, an homage to Bridget Riley, were not well-received by critics. However, he found his voice in works that addressed the AIDS crisis, producing memorial-like paintings with imagery such as candelabras, chandeliers, and rococo motifs against dark backgrounds. His use of dots in some pieces suggested the lesions caused by AIDS-related sarcomas, underscoring his response to the devastation of the epidemic. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bleckner’s work expanded to include the *Constellation* and *Architecture of the Sky* series, invoking celestial imagery and domed interiors.

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Around this time, he also began his Cell paintings, focusing on diseased human cells, a motif that became personal when his father lost his battle with cancer. His continued interest in the microscopic aspects of the body is evident in his representations of DNA and cancer cells. Bleckner also explored other motifs, including a series of bird paintings between 1995 and 2003, and experimented with different surfaces and techniques, such as the airbrush.

At the age of 45, Bleckner became the youngest artist to receive a midcareer retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1995. His work is held in numerous prestigious collections, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. His exhibitions have spanned globally, with shows at institutions such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin, Reina Sofia in Madrid, L.A. County Museum in Los Angeles, Kunstmuseum Luzern in Switzerland, and the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern. Bleckner continues to live and work in New York.

The public opening will take place on January 16th, 2025 from 4 – 7 pm at Avenue Louise 430, Brussels—1050 in the presence of the artist. For further information, please get in touch with press@maruanimercier.com.