

Slater Bradley | *Ketu*

Opening May 10 - 21.30pm

On view 10.05 – 08.09.18

There are multiple relations of tension and balance at play in the thirteen works included in Slater Bradley's "Ketu", among them photography and painting, Europe and Asia, matter and energy, and the personal and the cosmic. The title of the exhibition derives from the Vedic term for the "shadow planet" that marks a point of intersection with the sun, creating an eclipse. In Vedic astrology, Ketu is associated with the burden of the past as well as struggle, confusion, and pain, but it also allows for the dissolving of earthly experience into otherworldly knowledge. Sometimes appearing as the image of a headless human torso with a fish or dragon's tail, Ketu represents intellect yielding to enlightenment, transcending the illusions of visible, material experience to reach divine consciousness. The design in sodalite crystal stones on the floor of the exhibition is the symbol for Ketu. Bradley positions this element so that in order to navigate the space, the viewer must have an awareness of her embodiment, must not contract into an observing eye scanning the walls or a screen. The rough cobbles have patches and veins of dusty but intense cobalt, transforming the colors of the vivid, precise wall works into raw tactile matter, sharp and heavy. The lines and rings of dappled blue resemble a river and whirlpool. Dark and light vertical crystals placed at the center of the swirls seem to command the flow.

Vision and its limits is an intricate theme here. A recurring motif in the exhibition is the oculus/portal. Most of the two-dimensional works consist of the layering of mount, c-print photograph, and paint in blues and gold. The same photograph is used for all of these. It is an image of the pierced domed ceiling of a small Venetian chapel. A miniaturized homage to the Pantheon, the modest 18th century circular church of La Maddalena was the site of a 2017 exhibition by Bradley that explored an historic solar event with sacred significance for many cultures. "Ketu" is in some sense a processing of that previous installation, most evidently in the use of the photograph of the oculus dome as the material ground for the current works. The hole streaming sunlight onto white plaster and marble becomes a flat painted circle in the "Ketu" pictures, the anchoring point for geometric compositions of opaque but lustrous paint in colors with hieratic associations – lapis, turquoise, gold, and black. The image of the chapel's sky-opened eye is occluded, becoming an esoteric, secretive gold disk. The black and white photograph of a quintessentially European space,

a model of Renaissance humanist faith-through-reason is concealed by elementary but somehow occult painted forms, circles and beam-like triangles in the palette of an Egyptian sarcophagus.

The earlier exhibition in Venice celebrated the phenomenon of a rare solar alignment thought to create a portal or gateway to spiritual wisdom. Many of the paintings in “Ketu” were begun during the period of the Venetian exhibition. Bradley explains how the sun “shield” works in Italy evolved into the current star and eclipse works:

I became fixated on my photograph of the oculus of La Maddalena hanging in my studio during “Sundoor”. I reprinted this image over and over at varying scales of the Golden Rectangle linked to the numbers of the Fibonacci sequence. I then animated the black, white, and grey digital pixels by overlaying bold color, line, and geometric forms in a way that insists on tactility and human affect. Each work took on its own energy and presence.

The celestial “sundoor” has now closed and the current show seems like a meditation on that loss. At the same time, Bradley describes how he “found being in the studio with these works to be an incredibly light, joyful, and powerful time.” In keeping with the concept of duality that structures the exhibition, many works appear in pairs. Me + Michael and Coba (both 2017) are rectangles of the same dimensions, one perfectly bisected diagonally into gold and black halves and one with a more complex division into the golden ratio, with two fields rendered in differing textures – gold leaf and gold paint marker. The only two paintings that lack the layer of occluded photograph represent Ketu and its astrological counterpart Rahu. Diamond Ketu (2017) is a diamond-oriented square in rich indigo. This form combines the perfect congruency of sides and angles with the cardinal directions, creating something like an improbable deep-space compass. The opposing invisible “planet” Rahu (2018) – the northern, ascending dragon’s head to Ketu’s southern, descending tail – is portrayed as a disk of swirling gold smoke, ornate and dynamic.

Bradley has titled many of the new works after the giant stars that make up the belt of Orion. These stars will come into contact with the sun during the time of the exhibition, setting up a sort of imaginary signaling or invocation of cosmological energy. Indeed, many of the works in the show seem like clues or auguries, traces or guides. Focus and expansion, repetition and singularity, obsession and release all create friction in Bradley’s current work, sparking glimmers and rays that lure the viewer to reflection.

Rachel Baum, New York, 2018