

Gabrielė Adomaitytė

“Documentary Exactness”

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‘As a painter you have to consider first of all what is really important about images. In times of Instagram and informational overload, I feel the need to clarify the complexity and diversity of imagery today. The visual world is so full of everything, so unstable and unpredictable. My paintings should reflect that condition.’

Lithuanian artist Gabrielė Adomaitytė (b. 1994) paints from photographs, Xerox copies and many other forms of printed matter. In some of her works, a white frame around the image exemplifies that the picture is essentially a cut out from a much larger and boundless image world. The physical qualities of the source material are somehow preserved in the paintings, like the crumples and folds in a scan printed onto paper (*Xeroxed*, 2018) or the sun-bleached page of a book (*Untitled (Sunbleach #2)*, 2018). All kinds of sources have been used, from old catalogues of Baltic jewellery to glossy fashion advertisements, from scientific diagrams to medical nano-photographs. Painting these images, Adomaityte addresses the amazing multiplicity of the visual world.

During her studies at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, Adomaitytė collected reproductions of art works and clippings from newspapers and magazines, which she assembled on a series of cardboard charts. Interested in the systematics of archiving and classification, she found inspiration in Aby Warburg’s unequivocal *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1929): a collection of images from various sources, exploring associative relations that are nigh impossible to express in words. When examining discarded family albums of people unknown to her, Adomaitytė tried to figure out the logic behind the lay-out of the photographs. Recently, she gathered piles of VHS-tapes and books that once belonged to her father, who died when she was thirteen, questioning whether or not she could work with such personally charged subject matter. It was not childhood memories or nostalgic sentiment she was after, but a concern for recording and conserving images and what they represent. In the end, preserving and displaying images in family albums, data banks, archives and indeed museums, is also a way of representing the world.

Transforming this visual information into paintings, Adomaitytė relies on her great technical skills in tracing, copying and duplicating by hand. In paintings such as *A Slight Shift in the Angle* (2018), an image is reproduced more than once, creating the impression of a sequence or a loop. During the process of painterly reproduction, slight transformations take place. The phenomenon of ‘generational loss’ comes to mind. Copying from copies (analogue as well as digital) will inevitably result in loss of quality, as images irreversibly fade into hazy shades of grey. Adomaitytė enjoys these moments, when the motive seems to be falling apart, verging on the edge of legibility. When she finishes a painting, she often can’t remember what the original source image looked like.

A sense of disappearance is manifest in several works in this exhibition, most notably in *Should You Slow Down* (2018). The painting lacks a specific referent and seems to present us with an erased image, showing nothing but semi-translucent brushstrokes. In *Untitled (Health Chart)* (2018), a stenciled depiction of a pelvis is countered by an empty white frame of equal size. The frame, as primal indicator of images, circumscribes a menacing void suggestive of a warning.

The multitude of imagery is explored in *Untitled (Studio Wall)* (2018). As the title indicates, the subject is a large wall in the painter’s studio at De Ateliers in Amsterdam. The white surface supports many different images, not only paintings but also clippings (images from the Baltic jewellery catalogue surface again) and drawings (in the centre, one may recognise a pencil sketch of Rodin’s *Thinker*), with a black stain resulting from a test with a spray-can in the top corner. *Untitled (Studio Wall)* exceeds

simple documentation. The artist translated the surface she works on into a subject for a work, highlighting the diversity in visual appearances of the source material that inspires her.

In some paintings, Adomaityte combines selection, editing and juxtaposition of images with a sensitivity for bodily physicality. In *Untitled (Flesh)* (2018), shimmering brown and purple hues evoke the vulnerability of bruised skin. *Biological Matter* (2018) was painted from a series of scans of the artist's own hand, copied time and again and resulting in a sequence of mutating organisms. Both paintings originated in a time when the artist became interested in the semiotics of medical scans and x-rays. In these works, scientific methods of processing visual data are carefully balanced with a delicate softness and the intimacy of the human body.

A sense of historical time pervades some of these paintings. Greyish textures make one think of geological strata; traces of times gone by. Take a look at *Dark Matter* (2018). The image is the result of endlessly zooming in on a Xeroxed photograph, to the point where the image dissolves into complete abstraction. The opaque anthracite grey gives substance to the ephemeral. The blow-up makes the detail monumental and the insignificant important, but the painting refrains from explanations. Its muteness and frozenness are characteristics shared with the work of Vija Celmins and Marieta Chirulescu.

In the ultrafast circulation of digital imagery, images have a very short lifespan, where the attention of audiences diminish increasingly. Adomaitytė's work seems to reinstall a sense of duration into imagery, exploring how images may continue to be actual. *'My work deals with images and where they come from and how they can continue to live on. Painting allows that.'*

Author of the text

Dominic van den Boogerd (Quotes of the artist taken from a conversation with the author at De Ateliers, Amsterdam, 18 June 2019. Proofread by Jacob Dwyer.)

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