

# Pearl Lam Galleries

Hong Kong

## Wild Silence: A Solo Exhibition by Jana Benitez

Exhibition Dates 8 Sept–29 Oct, 2022 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm

Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Hong Kong—Pearl Lam Galleries is delighted to present *Wild Silence*, a solo exhibition by Filipino-American artist Jana Benitez. This exhibition showcases Benitez’s recent work and her investigation of the countless ways that painting can inform our understanding of the human body.

*Wild Silence* celebrates the medium of painting as uniquely equipped to explore the complexity and mystery of our embodied experience. In the exhibition title, “wild” captures the intuitive, boundless qualities of our feelings and sensations, while “silence” connotes the deliberate withdrawal from worldly distractions required for us to be present to our immediate experience.

In the gallery space, a singular buoyant spirit runs through a diverse array of painting styles and formats. Sparse, lyrical compositions of dancing figures, for example, hang alongside more visceral, explosive, gestural pieces in dense impasto as well as calm abstractions of expansive space. Benitez employs a wide range of painterly techniques—from traditional painting with brushes and squeegees to experimental water reticulation—all in service of expressing the intensity, depth, and intricacies of feelings. Furthermore, the artist varies the pace and size of her marks, their levels of transparency or opacity, the relationship between colour massing and line, the wetness and dryness of the paint, and most importantly, the innovative manner in which these techniques can layer on top of one another. In turn, the human body is recognised in a multitude of ways: as a holistic refuge, as a tuning fork, as a carrier of memory, as a vehicle for somatic information, as a loudspeaker for intuition, as carnal matter, and as a site for energetic alchemy. This is most explicit in Benitez’s series of intimate drawings, which provide clues to potential interpretations of the exhibition at large.

Rooted in the history of painting and its formal developments, Benitez’s practice seeks to synthesise her visual acumen with her personal research into contemporary psychology, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Tantra. Specifically, she has focused on our reflexive fight-flight-freeze response to danger or feeling triggered and wonders whether this defence mechanism can instead be replaced by a commitment to pause-stay-soften. In a moment of increasing social unrest and racism, she is uninterested in matching aggression with aggression. Instead, her work posits the question: how can we make space for more openness and genuine compassion?

In one way or another, every artwork in the show grapples with the mechanics of energetic transformation in the human body. Often, figures are insinuated then obscured; they crystallise and then disappear. Forms exist in liminal states: in flux, emerging, dissolving, cracking open, slipping through, reaching upwards, morphing, and becoming. Through her painting practice, Benitez trains herself to “stay present in the rawness of pure feeling”. For example, she deploys gestural abstraction to activate the sensation of life-force energy that radiates and rises up through the body. Many of her paintings on view read like love letters to intuition and give visual form to the affirmative “yes”

feeling that we often experience in our gut. Given that Benitez relies primarily on intuition for her formal decisions, these gestural paintings are not mere exercises for celebrating freewill but are meta-manifestations of philosophical and spiritual ideals.

Brimming with vibrant colour, Benitez's paintings oscillate between gestural abstraction and figuration, chaos and order, brute force and tenderness. Simultaneously, they convey fullness and emptiness, presence and absence, contraction and expansion. In celebration of these dualities, this exhibition makes space to contain contradiction and to cultivate our capacity to be with ambiguity.

*Wild Silence* is an invitation for us to let go of our habitual storylines, to listen actively and deeply with our whole being, and to open ourselves to the vast world of sensation, intuition and interconnectedness. With an edgy installation that builds from room to room and crescendos in the final gallery space, the experience of walking through this dynamic exhibition in person is not to be missed.

## About the Artist

Jana Benitez was born and raised in New York City within the context of a Filipino family and continues to live and work in her native city, as well as in mid-coast Maine and Manila. She holds an MFA from Boston University and a BFA from Brown University (magna cum laude). Her vibrant, expressive paintings are highly sought after by collectors and institutions in Southeast Asia, Europe, and the United States. Benitez's works are included in major private and public collections, such as Crystal Bridges Museum in Arkansas, USA; the Pataka Museum in New Zealand; and Ayala Museum, Museo Pambata, St. Luke's Hospital, and the Philippine Women's University in the Philippines.

## About Pearl Lam Galleries

Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. Founded in 2005, the gallery plays a vital role in stimulating international dialogue and cross-cultural exchange between the East and West.

Following a rigorous programme, Pearl Lam Galleries presents museum-quality exhibitions that re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice in Asia. With a thoughtfully balanced roster of Chinese and international artists, the gallery is strategic in its curation, positioning itself as an educator.

The gallery maintains a flagship space in the historic Pedder Building in Hong Kong, whilst the Shanghai gallery is situated in the heritage architecture in the Bund district. With a team of international staff, Pearl Lam Galleries' reach is global, having presentations at major international art fairs including The Armory Show, Art Cologne, Art Basel Hong Kong, Frieze Masters, and West Bund Art and Design.

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