

NICHOLAS METIVIER GALLERY

MOSES SALIHOU: *THE WAY I SEE*

PRESS RELEASE

January 20th – February 10th

Moses Salihou sees his practice as a regimen. He paints every day, often working late into the night. While his routine is strict and methodical, his painting style is unconstrained by rules and categorization. He does not create preliminary sketches. Instead, he arrives at the studio with only an inkling of the portraits he will paint that day: the tilt of a head, the glint from an earring, the outline of a form. Sometimes, if a particular image has gained momentum, he allows it to flood a series of canvases; each canvas a direct response to the one that preceded it. His first solo exhibition at the gallery, *The Way I See*, features a striking quartet of such images. Set against a deep black field, the colourful, mosaic-like faces of Salihou's portraits consume the composition and can be installed with each head turned to view a counterpart, as though engaged in dialogue. Salihou's thick application of paint by palette knife creates a textural intensity that mirrors our own internal complexities. This reveals the core of Salihou's messaging: his belief that human beings are composites of various identities, experiences, beliefs, and emotions. Salihou, originally from Cameroon, but working in Canada for the last decade, is himself the product of multiple lived experiences.

Salihou leaves his portraits only loosely representational through his gestural approach to handling oil paint. In the areas denoting faces the paint appears wet, as though still liquid and swirling into figuration; but Salihou does not allow ossification. There are no facial features, only a collection of layer upon layer of dense markings: some squiggly, others more geometrical. Salihou's influence

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from Jean Paul Riopelle is abundantly clear in these impasto strokes of paint applied by palette knife. Like Riopelle, Salihou paints in deep, rich colours - browns, reds, muddy oranges and whites, with an occasional piercing vibrant blue or purple. These rich surface effects provide Salihou's work with a sense of dynamism that captures the fluidity and movement he ascribes to the concepts of identity and belonging. Seeing our corporeal and physical identities as always in conversation with one another, Salihou extends this notion to the active dialogue occurring between the figure in the painting and the viewer. As the faces of the portraits swirl in front of our eyes, we imbue our own experiences and beliefs into the vessels Salihou provides. Salihou speaks of his influence from artists like Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud, whose often haunting figures so viscerally reveal their torment. Salihou sees in them - in their looser lines and soft- edges - the porousness of people. Salihou lifts from their forms to create images that do not betray a specific emotion, yet demonstrate the same porosity, echoing their inner intricacies.

When Salihou first began painting, he was often faced by a lack of materials. Rather than this being a hindrance he allowed it to push him to be more creative in his approach, finding new ways to make marks with different mediums. Each experiment would then expand his repertoire and new techniques influenced the others he continued to draw on. This sense of experimentation is something Salihou seeks to uphold in his practice today, allowing for constant evolution in technique and subject matter in his work. Salihou draws inspiration from everywhere, actively engaging in references to the art historical canon which came before him. After a trip to Montreal, Salihou found himself creating works that

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teased the influence of biblical painting. Convergence 1 and 2 invoke the image of a cathedral ceiling: a large gathering of people occupy the foreground of both paintings, set against an airy blue background. Salihou blurs the group with a series of wavy brush strokes, melding them into one another so that they are indistinguishable. “Humankind is a village,” he tells us, and in each work in this exhibition he demonstrates how truly entwined we are.