

CYNTHIA HAWKINS: GWYNFOR'S SOUP, OR THE PROXIMITY OF MATTER

June 23 – August 11, 2023

Ortuzar Projects is pleased to present *Gwynfor's Soup, or The Proximity of Matter*, the gallery's first exhibition with Rochester-based artist Cynthia Hawkins (b. 1950, Queens, New York).

Through her ten new paintings, Hawkins has developed an improvisational process in which free-floating symbols, shapes, and fields of color are layered to occlude and veil each other in fractured planes. Appearing at once cellular and interstellar, the canvases seem to contain multiple compositions simultaneously, with varying spatial systems and color schemes that shift in and out of focus. The inspiration for her series has more banal origins, however: a photograph of tomato soup that a friend shared on social media. The interplay of overlapping beads of oil on broth, reflected light, and vividly saturated color initially appeared otherworldly to the artist, as the image was closely cropped enough for the soup to fill the entirety of the digital square. Amused and inspired by the reality of the images' subject and the complexity of its composition, Hawkins has riffed upon its internal visual relationships in a continuation of her longstanding investigation of abstraction.

Returning to questions fundamental to her work of the 1970s and 80s, Hawkins' new series employs grids and geometric systems to explore the spatial possibilities of painting. The paintings cut through a cross section of multiple planar realities, the results of her physical process at times resembling the methods of superimposition, layer modulation, and opacity play reminiscent of a digital environment such as Photoshop. Fields of contrasting colors warp around delineated forms to create curves, protrusions, and pockets from which bubbling orbs emerge. Like oil droplets swirling on the surface of soup broth, these distinct planes often abut one another like polar and non-polar molecules unable to bond. Globular forms, arrows, and invented symbols float freely across the surface, emphasizing a sense of movement and the potential for further transformation.

Throughout her career Hawkins has synthesized a commitment to abstraction and an interest in scientific concepts. Since the 1990s, her paintings have increasingly utilized imagery pulled from the observable world, her paint congealing into the almost-recognizable shapes of *things*—gesticulating organic forms that resemble cells under a microscope. In *Gwynfor's Soup, or The Proximity of Matter*, Hawkins seems to prove that abstraction is already always all around us. Her new series illustrates how the intertextual relationships that emerge between contours, gaps, and fugitive forms are capable of constituting an ecosystem on the surface of the canvas that is very much alive.

Hawkins is a longtime teacher, scholar, and curator. She received her doctorate in American Studies from the University of Buffalo, SUNY with a dissertation titled, "African American Agency and the Art Object, 1868-1917," and until recently she was the gallery director and curator at the Bertha V.B. Lederer Gallery, SUNY Geneseo, New York. She is the recipient of the 2023 Helen Frankenthaler Award for Painting and was included in the recent survey exhibition *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2022). Hawkins' solo exhibitions include *Natural Things, 1996–99*, STARS, Los Angeles (2022); *Clusters: Stellar and Earthly*, Buffalo Science Museum, Buffalo (2009); *New Works: The Currency of Meaning*, Cinque Gallery, New York (1989); and *Cynthia Hawkins*, Just Above Midtown/Downtown Gallery, New York (1981). Her work is in numerous public collections, including The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; and Kenkeleba Gallery, New York, among others. She lives and works in Rochester, New York.