

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



ENA SWANSEA

green light

13 MAY – 30 JULY 2021

Ben Brown Fine Arts presents *green light*, our third solo exhibition of American artist Ena Swansea, at the London gallery. The gallery's first solo exhibition since lockdown, the title *green light* implies the chance to at last put one's foot on the gas, after being stopped and daydreaming outside of clock time, not knowing what day it is. Swansea's new series is representative of her decontextualised and timeless style, directing attention back to painting itself.

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green light features recent large-scale canvases exploring motifs that recur within Swansea's practice, including snow, sea and the urban landscape, all bordering on abstraction and demonstrating the artist's ingenuity with the painted surface.

The brilliant and the muted colours of cinema, the velvet blacks, have stayed with Swansea's work since film school. These complex, layered paintings often collapse the subtle greys found in film into a dense and impenetrable dark field. Suspended in a plane of radiant colour, the tension between light and darkness is simultaneously attracting and repelling. Swansea's attention to the effects of transparency can be seen in her experimental investigations into the myriad ways in which an image itself can be migratory, invoking an oblique political critique.

The repeating motifs almost seem to function as frames of a film that cannot be made. The artist keeps a vast archive of photographs, working in a serial manner, returning to subjects again and again. In these recent paintings, the enforced solitude sustained globally in the wake of the pandemic is telegraphed. In these images, despite the now-fraught invocation of the natural world, there is a feeling that a suave urban figure has just exited the picture. They may express a wry commentary on the mute longing for an impossible utopia found in German romanticism and English landscape painting. Their shifting hallucinogenic forms may only be the unintentional disclosures of a Manhattan painter in lockdown. Somehow these landscapes manage to feel urban.

Simultaneously representing the world while signalling that narrative is decidedly missing, these 'slow paintings' have a sense of open-endedness. These works push the boundaries of realism, investigating myriad ways to depict moments as they flash by.

The paintings are intricately layered with mixed media. Working over many years with paint chemists, the artist incorporates pulverized mica, oil, marble, and graphite, to build a luminescent and cinematic quality. Swansea is venerated by fellow painters for her unique and complex mastery of the paint surface and ability to create nuance and depth in a distinctive practice and materials.

Ricocheting between representation and abstraction, materiality and sensation, set in an alternative present that seems familiar, the paintings are often based on recognizable or benign scenes. An ocean in winter, a shorn tree sprouting new branches, a young girl suspended in the air above a swirling sea – their uncanny and hazily dreamlike depiction becomes disquieting. The nebulous images seem both to give and to withhold. It is this ambiguity that allows the viewer to relate to the works in a more personal way, as though encountering a corrupted digital image, or recollecting an obscured memory of an indelible year.

Ben Brown Fine Arts is excited to welcome visitors back to the London gallery both in-person and digitally to share these mesmerising new works.

Image: Ena Swansea, *area code 2019*, 2021, oil and acrylic on linen, 274.3 x 208.3 cm; (108 x 82 in.)

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ABOUT ENA SWANSEA

Ena Swansea was born in 1966 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and studied film and painting at the University of South Florida. Swansea's work has been exhibited internationally at prominent institutions including MoMA PS1, New York; Saatchi Gallery, London; Deichtorhallen, Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg; and Musée d'Art Moderne (MUDAM), Luxembourg. Swansea's work is included in numerous public and private collections such as Museum of Modern Art, New York; Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, New York; Colby College Museum, Maine; Boca Raton Museum of Art, Florida; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg; and Olbricht Collection, Berlin. Swansea lives and works in New York City.

ABOUT BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

In 2004, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened its first location in the heart of Mayfair, London. The gallery quickly established itself on the international art scene with exhibitions of long-term gallery artists Candida Höfer, Tony Bevan, Claude & François-Xavier Lalanne, and Heinz Mack, amongst others, as well as momentous exhibitions of 20th century masters including Lucio Fontana, Alighiero Boetti and Gerhard Richter. In 2009, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened an exhibition space in Hong Kong, becoming the first international gallery to move to the city that would soon become a major international art hub. In Hong Kong, the gallery introduced notable exhibitions of Pablo Picasso, Sean Scully, Frank Auerbach and Miquel Barceló, as well as survey exhibitions of Chinese contemporary photography, the Düsseldorf School of Photography, 20th century Italian art, and the ZERO movement. In 2021, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened a third location in Palm Beach with an inaugural exhibition celebrating the legacy of American and European 20th century artists who developed a radical approach to making art, among them Alexander Calder, Georg Baselitz and Andy Warhol. The galleries regularly exhibit and develop programming for our renowned stable of international, multi-disciplinarian artists, including the aforementioned as well as Yoan Capote, Rob and Nick Carter, Kitty Chou, Awol Erizku, Nabil Nahas, José Parlá, Enoc Perez, Ena Swansea, Hank Willis Thomas, Gavin Turk and Jan Worst. The gallery is recognized for our depth of expertise and inventory in 20th century European and American art. Ben Brown Fine Arts participates in major art fairs worldwide, including Art Basel, Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Basel Miami Beach, The Armory Show, Frieze Masters, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York and West Bund Art & Design.

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