

Press release

Jelena Bulajić | *White on Black*

31 May – 27 July 2024

Opening reception: Thursday, 30 May 2024, 6–9pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to announce *White on Black*, a solo exhibition by the Serbian artist Jelena Bulajić. This will be the artist's third exhibition with the gallery and her first solo presentation in Madrid.

Jelena Bulajić's intricate paintings derive from meticulous studies of tactility and surface. More than their subjects, she is attracted to the actual textures of her source materials and the stories that they tell—their cracks, lines, irregularities, relative smoothness or roughness, and tactility—which she brings into a productive friction with the materiality of painting. In *White on Black*, which inverts a popular expression delineating clarity and unambiguousness, Bulajić lingers on surfaces that confound, mislead, and surprise to, in the artist's words, “make a fiction of a fiction appear.”

The notion of color has confounded philosophers for centuries because of the serious metaphysical issues that it raises. Does it exist independent of our minds? How do we actually experience color? David Hume notes that “Sounds, colors, heat and cold, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.” The contemporary color historian Victoria Finlay similarly argues that the best way that she's found to understand color “is to think not so much of something 'being' a color but of it 'doing' a color.” In a new series of monochromatic paintings, Bulajić “does” color, building up dozens of layers of black and white gloss varnish on transparent plexiglass until brilliant shades of blue appear. These optical illusions absorb and reflect their surroundings, including a series of paintings inspired by Hiroshi Sugimoto's Diorama photographs, which depict scenes from New York's Museum of Natural History in a startlingly lifelike manner. Converted into a negative view, Bulajić's painterly inversions amplify both the artifice and eeriness of the original images, while highlighting the physicality of paint—both the artist's own painting and the materials used to construct the elements of the diorama displays. “These Sugimoto works have a surface,” Bulajić says, “if you zoom in on the polar bear you can see how the paint cracked while it dried. [...] There are little holes all around the animals in the Gamsbok.” If the diorama is historically considered a precursor to photography, then Bulajić's meditations on this form in *White on Black* offer a profound reflection on the construction of images, the layers of fiction inherent in reproduction, and the refraction of influence.

Jelena Bulajić (b. 1990 Vrbas, Serbia) received her BA in Visual Art from the Academy of Arts at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. She went on to complete an MA at the City & Guilds of the London Art School and has exhibited internationally in London, Serbia, Germany, the U.S. and Scotland. Accolades include the GAM MA Fine Art Prize, City & Guilds of London Art School (2013), the Niš Art Foundation Award (2013), the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant (2012), and the Grand Diploma for Drawing, XIV INTERBIFEP (2011), among others. Bulajić lives and works in Belgrade, Serbia. She had her first institutional show in 2019 at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina (MSUV), Novi Sad, Serbia.