

Powerful, despite it all.

Sophie-Yen Bretez

8 June – 8 July 2023



Sophie-Yen Bretez, *I ran to find out What it means to live I fled from rain-soaked lands, To embrace the wet dawn Without understanding that I had to first of all Caress what has been buried for too long. - I exist, despite my past*, 2022, Oil painting, 59 x 59 in, 150 x 150 cm.

In celebration of the gallery's 5th anniversary, JD Malat is thrilled to present *Powerful, despite it all*, a solo exhibition by French-Vietnamese artist Sophie-Yen Bretez. A champion of emerging female artists, JD Malat is proud to collaborate with WAAW World: Women Artist Art Week in promoting Bretez's captivating show. On display at the gallery from June 8 to July 8 *Powerful, despite it all*, invites viewers to embark on a kaleidoscopic journey reflecting on themes of memory, pain, and resilience through the lens of universal femininity.

Thought-provoking and relatable, Bretez presents a timely narrative on femininity. Inspiring hope and healing through vibrant surrealist compositions she poses questions on self-expression and the social conformities imposed on women. Expressing her own understanding of femininity in the title of her exhibition as '*Powerful, despite it all*', Bretez, a Vietnam-born French artist, incites an influential dialogue on universal womanhood. Referring to her own identity, history, and resilience. Bretez further addresses events inflicted on many women such as violence and sexualization through symbolic and colorful paintings. Resonating with Simone Beauvoir's notion of the 'the second sex' in a society where male power is predominant, Bretez thoughtfully composes the portrayal of resistance and strength.

Rooting her artistic practice in self-awareness Bretez, a self-taught artist, is inspired by the freedom found in observing her own experiences and simultaneously translating them into an enigmatic visual language. Striving to present an infinite dialogue between herself, the paintings, and the viewer, Bretez confronts themes of the human condition and the ambivalence of life. *Powerful, despite it all*, presents an engaging narrative encouraging reflection on sexuality, trauma, and healing through vibrant chromatic compositions.

A natural storyteller, Bretez begins each painting with a poem linked to memory. Titling her works after these spontaneous and instinctual poems Bretez incorporates an additional layer of dialogue between the work, the viewer, and Bretez herself. Testifying to the intimate and the universal through substantive narratives Bretez seeks to perpetuate a wider reflection of political, societal, philosophical, and existential themes.

Interested in challenging the traditional male gaze, Bretez utilizes reverse voyeurism as a tool to question our societal relationship to the naked female body. The figures in Bretez's paintings are evidently nude with bodies that appear 'perfect' corresponding to the beauty canons of our contemporary society and posing reflections on sexualization. A signature in Bretez's works is her figures' direct gaze on the viewer. Unflinching and strong, the women look directly out at the spectator, serving to simultaneously create distance and prove they are not at the viewer's disposal rather they assert control of their own bodies.

Presenting a thematic fusion of autobiography and narrative identity, *Powerful, despite it all* illuminates Bretez's relationship with the world. Building upon her signature style of dream-like surrealist figuration, Bretez skillfully depicts complex emotional states isolated within painterly narratives. Utilizing vibrant colours to create an alluring sense of both warm and cold, Bretez creates an ambivalent aesthetic. She successfully weaves together past and present through compositions marked by repetitive geometric lines as seen in the decor, checkerboards, and the horizon. Steeped in symbolism the checkered floors extend the allusion to a game in which the body is held within. Additionally, each piece displays a sunlit infinite horizon symbolizing "the possible and the elsewhere", a salutary beyond when the present seems too difficult to overcome. Messages of hope and perseverance permeate Bretez's work as she seeks to provide strength in the face of vulnerability. Showcasing the powerful and dynamic feminine, Bretez's work succeeds in meaningfully adding to the feminist discourse.

An influential and engaging exhibition JD Malat is proud to present Sophie-Yen Bretez's *Powerful, despite it all*.

For more information, images and comment, please contact: press@jdmalat.com JD Malat Gallery, 30
Davies St, Mayfair, London, W1K 4NB
Opening hours: Monday – Friday: 10am – 6pm; Saturday: 12pm – 6pm.