

HYPERALLERGIC

“It Feels Sacrificial”: An Artist Repeatedly Imprints Her Body on Paper

Keltie Ferris discusses her exhibition *M\A\R\C\H* at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, for which she covered herself in oil and pigment and lay on top of large sheets of paper.

By Samuel Jablon 04/19/2017



Keltie Ferris, “Backlash” (2017), oil and powdered pigment on paper, 39 15/16 by 26 1/4 in. (© Keltie Ferris, image courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash)

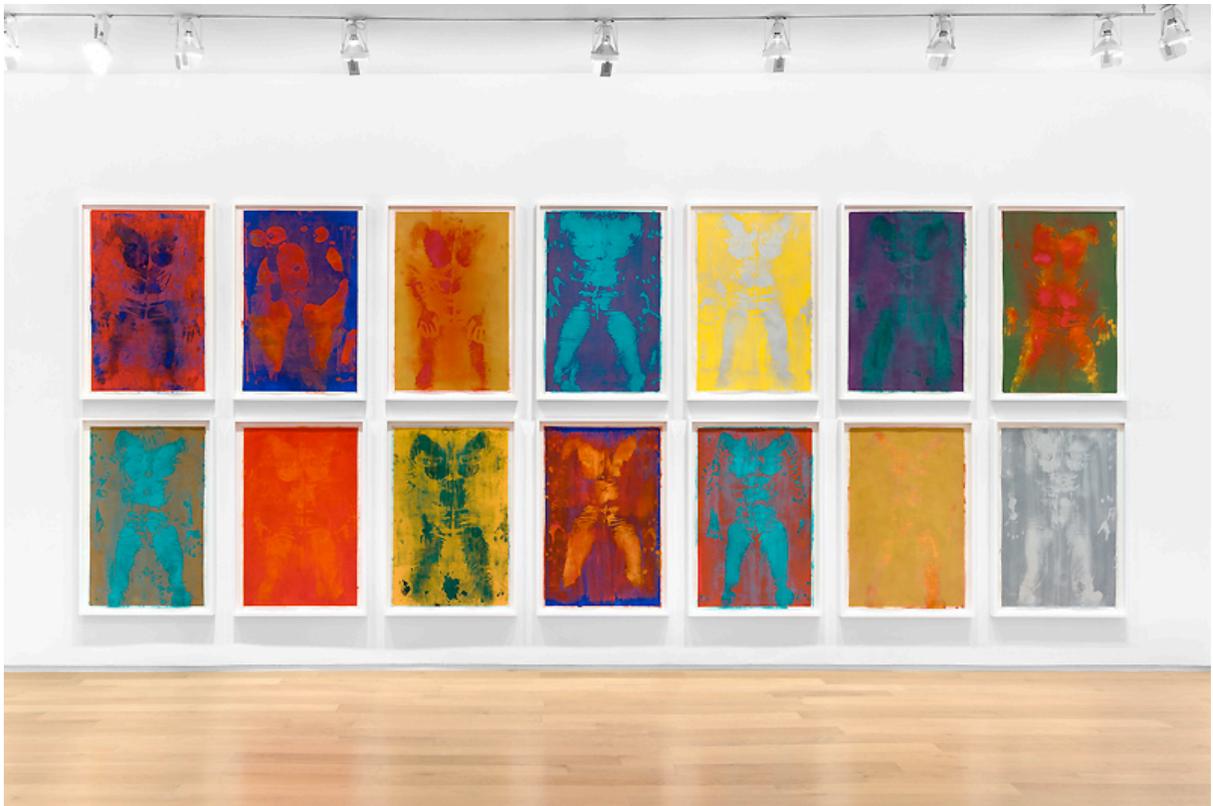
MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

The Brooklyn-based painter Keltie Ferris is known for her spray-painted, layered, and pixelated abstract paintings. She recently shifted away from this style to focus on her body prints, which are currently on view at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in an exhibition titled M\A\R\C\H.

In these works she literally covers herself in oil and pigment and lies on top of a human-sized sheet of paper. Depending on the print, the designs either obscure or highlight the artist's gender. "I've always been looking for some sort of extremely indexical 'I am here' mark to put into my paintings," she said.

Ferris and I discussed her work in M\A\R\C\H and how she used her body not only as a tool, but to political effect by building an army of bodies.

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Installation view of M\A\R\C\H at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York (photo by Mark-Woods.com, © Keltie Ferris, courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash)

Samuel Jablon: *How did you decide to make body prints?*

Keltie Ferris: I've always been looking for some sort of extremely indexical "I am here" mark to put into my paintings. Something literal, like a fingerprint. I tried several times to do it in my actual painting but found it either cheesy or unsatisfying. I first tried to be more committed to making body prints after I saw the Jasper Johns Grey show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art almost 10 years ago. And then again when I saw a David Hammons piece at MoMA PS1 years later.

SJ: *Has the process of covering yourself in oil and pigment changed how you approach painting?*

KF: That's a great question; I'm not sure I know the answer to it. Covering myself with oil and literally prostrating myself to my work — it feels sacrificial. And it feels humbling to put my myself and my body at the mercy of what my work demands. I don't think I can put it into words, but I am certain that this is affecting my work on canvas somehow or will in time, in some subterranean way.

SJ: *Do you find that your use of color changes between the body prints and paintings?*

KF: The body prints are as colorful as humanly possible, even more full of color than my paintings usually are.

SJ: *What I noticed in this series of body prints was that the ones with your head appear to be more vulnerable while the headless works seem aggressive, like you're about to duel. Could you talk about the difference between the two?*



KF: I've aimed to select works for the show that have a range of attitudes. And yes, the headless torsos usually have this Elvis stance that is somehow a natural by-product of my body on paper. It does have this forwardness. And without the specificity of my face, they have more of a general modular quality — like an army of the every woman or every man. Whereas the ones with my face, I think, are more specifically me or more specifically someone. Also, they have a sideways movement, because my nose is boney and thus in the way of a good frontal print. So they seem like they are heading

sideways or back, which implies something more defensive or under scrutiny.

SJ: *The body prints seem to be more direct. Through your body placement and use of colors, each print captures an emotion, from the vulnerable to the assertive. Do you think they are more direct or politicized than your paintings?*



Installation view of *M/A/R/C/H* at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York (photo by Mark-Woods.com, © Keltie Ferris, courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash)

KF: I'm immersing my body in the body prints — there's nothing more direct than that. I'm using my body as a tool — there are no intermediaries such as brushes. So yeah, I'm in it, and it's direct.

SJ: *The title of the exhibition is M\A\R\C\H. Is there a covert or overt connection to the women's marches that have been popping up all over the world?*

KF: Oh, very overt.

SJ: *What is the significance of the title?*

KF: Well, armies march. And so do protesters. Modular bodies moving in grids, in formation, showing their power or maybe their resistance to power — that's a march. And *M\A\R\C\H* further pictorializes this idea. Of course I was

thinking of the current political horror we are all enduring, and the terror that this is what protofascism looks like in the US.

SJ: *Could you talk about the importance of taking this stance with your work?*

KF: I want the work to be reflective of myself as a being in general, as well as a political actor. I wanted it to refer to the accumulation of those individuals as well — my multiple selves together, imagined armies of citizens. Therefore I hung the show to emphasize the seriality of prints. The show is packed — it is not underhung.

