

Stefanie Heinze on Her New Petzel Gallery Show "MORTAR"

 papermag.com/stefanie-heinze-mortar-petzel

June 5, 2024



For her [Petzel](#) debut with "Frail Juice" back in 2020, *PAPER* invited Berlin-born artist [Stefanie Heinze to interview herself](#). Since then, she's relocated to New York and opened her second solo show at the gallery's Chelsea location, now on display through Saturday, June 8. Titled "[MORTAR \(the cute ones shouldn't go unnoticed\)](#)", Heinze's new collection of work "investigates systems of knowledge and truth, challenging received notions of representation," according to a release.

To Heinze, “mortar” symbolizes the container for something to be developed further. A mortar and pestle, for example, is the site for different ingredients to be crushed and mixed together, in some cases turned into a paste to help bind building blocks. On a human level, this is not unlike our “longing for something even better and bigger and harder,” Petzel explains, as reflected in Heinze’s process to create the canvases shown in *MORTAR*.



Photography: Jason Mandella (Courtesy of Stefanie Heinze and Petzel, New York)

Stefanie Heinze

Breeze Blocks, 2024

Oil and graphite on linen 51 x 73 in

129.5 x 185.4 cm

(SH 24/006)

Similarly, Heinze’s small-scale drawings and collages undergo several evolutions over weeks, before eventually becoming large-scale tracings. Her work is neither figuration nor abstraction, with colorful and ambiguous worlds (with banana slices, body parts and more) that are at once still and in motion for viewers to arrive at their own interpretations. In our 2020 conversation, she told herself that “composition” is the most boring painting topic, which is perhaps why *MORTAR* feels like an undoing of any intentional arrangements.

Below, Stefanie Heinze interviews herself (again) about tarot cards, rules and art history. Plus, her favorite color is still yellow years later.



Photography: Cavid Dhen (Courtesy of Stefanie Heinze and Petzel, New York)

Stefanie and friend Natalie at Riis Beach.

The last time we talked was October 2020. How has your practice shifted since then, if at all?

I've had a few solo shows since, like "Stories of the Imaginary (Self-Portrait of Two Lemons)" in 2021 and "Dimensions of the Fool" in 2022, as well as group shows like "In Heat Wind Wounds Holes" in 2022.

Is yellow still your favorite color?

Yes.

Is there a color you wish you hadn't used in the new works?

Yellow. But I put on glitter pigment on it, so it all went fine.

You just moved from Berlin last year. How has your experience been?

[See cards, below.]



(Courtesy of Stefanie Heinze and Petzel, New York)

You are into tarot. Does that imagery appear in these paintings?

Yes, well not in these paintings. Not in a literal way. It's more the intuitive approach that is similar, the potential of decision-making and change. It's about building trust, trust that something is going to happen.

Are there any rules in painting?

Sure, they come with the medium and the format you choose. But the drawing is the "rule" for me, before the paintings become paintings. I work close to the drawing.

Banana slices, body parts, ordinary objects — these are recurring elements. Why?

The pictures are made while keeping in mind things like thickness in paint, color — in a bodily way that impacts you — or through shapes, because I can. It's about making these things exist together in a confined space.

What else exists in your paintings?

Well, a commonality for sure, but also an uncertainty that plays a role — every part is a main character. It's about hierarchies and sharing spaces. I think the viewers' shared experience is an ambiguity of the coexistence of being able to name what they see in the imagery, in relation to what they feel while they are experiencing them. It can be very overwhelming, especially with the size and the intensity of the color in the paintings. They become humbled and a part of the imagery while they experiencing them. That's *MORTAR*, too.



(Courtesy of Stefanie Heinze and Petzel, New York)

Stefanie Heinze's nails, done by herself.

What else is *MORTAR*?

It's about brutality and tenderness, the act of self-maintenance and truth seeking, a digestif for the cruelty in the world. My friend said, "New York turns you into paste." You go from there. (The cute ones shouldn't go unnoticed).

So, language in opposition?

I try to find a different approach to how I talk about my works, through titles. Going back to uncertainty, I like to think of what I don't know, versus what I already know. The same applies to imagery and finding what is stimulating.

What about art historical references?

I just don't work after other artists. I'm more inspired by music, poetry, fruit, gemstones, the strange objects spread on the Brooklyn streets and nail art, my weekly singing lessons, memes, spiritual practices, the change of weather, the joy and love of my friends. Beyond references, I include what connects me with other beings. For example, I feel connected to the material of the paint medium, the slurpy mud or the grinding experience of it, as well as the explorative joy of painting.

You might be the only one satisfied with my response. I don't want people to rely on these references to approach my pictures.

What have people said about your new works?

A lot. Often they've asked me what's going on in my head, assuming something psychedelic, but I just sync with what seems like something that I want to see. No drug influence, just process. It's more about letting go of expectations. I guess it's what these YouTube tarot readers would call alignment. Some people have said they see portals, or that the paintings do things to their body.



(Courtesy of Stefanie Heinze and Petzel, New York)

Stefanie Heinze's nails, done by herself.

Finally, what have you been up to since the opening?

I slept and danced and did my nails.

What are you working on now?

I have an exhibition at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin, Italy opening in November this year, and we're working on a catalogue, as well.

Photography: Amelie Amei Kahn-Ackermann (Courtesy of Stefanie Heinze and Petzel, New York)