

Ballon Rouge is pleased to present its inaugural exhibition, and Merve İseri's first solo exhibition, "her brain is a traveling white bullet," curated by Nicole O'Rourke in Istanbul, Turkey from September 8 - 28, 2017.

Iseri paints directly from the tube, in both acrylic and oil, working on unprimed canvas and sometimes on cotton she has dyed. She uses pastels and her fingers, too; these are the moments when there is gradation and a sense of fleetingness to her lines. Then, there is spray paint. These variations in material and in the weight or precision of her lines makes it so that even in their abstraction the works act like what a visualization of an oral history or a dream would look like. This moving, changing see-saw of passed down memory; sometimes the lines are strong and sure and almost representative, other times they flicker or combust.

It would be disingenuous to the viewer to discuss the meaning of the works in this exhibition. That is, and has always been, dependent on your judgement. With abstract painting in particular it often feels necessary to compound every stroke with meaning, and the canvas with a specific story. You want it to mean something easily discernible because in looking at an abstract work what you are confronted with is only yourself. In many ways an abstract painting is the viewer's blank canvas, and the ultimate tabula rasa in retrospect for art historians and theorists. You want to be told what it means or what it stands for because everything is already so confusing and so completely and overwhelmingly distressing. You want it to mean something, to have a specific political viewpoint, to act in accordance to social justice issues, to speak about sexism, racism, capitalism. It is not a surprise that abstraction, surrealism, symbolism—throughout art history—sees its golden eras in times of very real political, social, and cultural crises.

İseri's intent, like a traveling white bullet, is directed and symbolic, albeit opposed to assigned meaning. Instead, the works aim to have personal conversations with the viewer; the traveling white bullet is a symbol of a peaceful and subversive violence. This could be compared to reading the diary of someone you never knew or it can be compared to watching an animal die naturally. Most likely you will feel an instinctual level of humanity and empathy, no matter the content, no matter how abstract your connection, and no matter how quickly it passes by and through you. In a time when 'seeing' has been corrupted, co-opted, desensitized and surveilled, Iseri's work asks, "What if we didn't ask to be born into all this?... how do we feel for what we see, unsullied?" Her brain is the traveling white bullet, ever-moving forward to find the peaceful abstraction that could allow the viewer to forget the rest and feel comfortably linked, emotive, and simultaneously out of control.

*İseri (b. 1992, Istanbul) is a painter working mostly with oils on an unprimed canvas. She graduated from Politecnico di Milano, Communication Design in 2014, and since then has been living between London and Istanbul. She has shown works since 2015 in group shows in Chicago USA, Milan Italy, Istanbul Turkey and London UK.*