

Michele Araujo: A straight-in shot | Two Coats of Paint | February 14, 2023



Untitled, 2019, mixed media, collage on vellum, 72 x 39.5 inches.
(Photos by Alon Koppel Photography)

Contributed by Sharon Butler / In “The Vulnerable Paintings,” on view at OSMOS Address through March 4, Michele Araujo has decisively found her voice. After working on rigid aluminum panels for years, Araujo has shifted to sheets of vellum, unapologetically embracing the beauty of color and the seductive nature of process. The result is a handsome and satisfying kind of arrival.



Untitled, 2020, mixed media, collage on vellum, 39.5 x 26.5 inches.

To begin..., a warm and engaging artist's book she released on the occasion of the show, is a memoir of sorts, pairing images of paintings in the show with short narrative passages about her life. Whereas the abstract paintings wave off attempts at probing interpretation or specific ideas, the book features moving anecdotes about growing up in North Providence, Rhode Island, one of three daughters in an Armenian family whose recent forebears – her grandparents – had fled the 1915–17 Armenian genocide. Her parents felt like outsiders, and she inherited a sense that she didn't belong. An admittedly wild teenager, Araujo harnessed an interest in art and began commuting to Boston to attend classes at the Museum School. Nevertheless, she recalls, "my second year in art school was a bust. I was just sort of a lost soul. A strange background. Trying to be an artist...working in bars...Spiraling out of control."



She cherished the camaraderie she found working in low-paying jobs as a teenager and running with a tough group of girls who didn't back down from fights. Eventually, she met Adam Simon, a young artist who studied at the New York Studio School, and accordingly gravitated towards New York herself. For Araujo, the New York art world was a daunting place. "I think I spent the first year silent," she writes. "Except with Adam." It was at pool halls that Araujo found the comfort and connectedness she craved. "I would pretty much always want to go to a bar with a table. You're playing a game with a stranger. Sometimes you chat. You quickly get the player, though it's not impossible to get it wrong." A little coyly she adds: "It can be quite chill. And very sexy."

With her current exhibition, Araujo seems to have embraced the flow of life and accepted its uncertainties without fear. Her previous work featured extravagantly layered paint and collage elements, compelling to be sure but imparting some degree of guarded insularity. It looks as though many of these new pieces, most untitled and on vellum, were made in one go. The vivid colors exude a breeziness and a sense of joy, and the compositions have a new openness and transparency. It's as if Araujo has come to appreciate that the straight-in shot can be just as elegant as a three-rail bank, no English required.

"Michele Araujo: The Vulnerable Paintings," OSMOS Address, 50 E. 1st Street, New York NY. Through March 4, 2023.