



CLEARING

EXTRA SWEET HARMONY (THE ROOM OF THE OCTOPUS)

An exhibition of new works by **Loïc Raguénès**

June 10 – July 17, 2021

CLEARING is pleased to present *EXTRA SWEET HARMONY (THE ROOM OF THE OCTOPUS)*, Loïc Raguénès's eighth solo exhibition with the gallery. Expanding on and developing his series of "Seascapes" and introducing new "Planet" paintings and an individual depiction of an interior, this exhibition explores the fundamental tenets of painting while touching upon the universal yet ever-important notion of our presence in the world.

Through his series of "Seascapes", Raguénès uses undulating lines and monochrome backgrounds to create abstract paintings that ultimately resist abstraction, while attempting to capture the infinite within the finite space of the canvas. Even with the addition of a grey border in many of these new works, they suggest the repetitive and unending nature of the sea, as if the waves could rise within the frame and break outside it, ad infinitum: "That sea forever starting and re-starting" as Paul Valéry wrote. The wave-signs are repeatedly drawn by the artist, interpreting them much like a musician would loosely play a score. The rhythm (represented by the lines or waves) is repeated on time, while the melody—or harmony—meanders in the depths of the painting's texture and post-impressionist brushstrokes. There is, no matter how hard we try, no way to un-see them as the sea.

As a cosmic counterpart to the seascapes, Raguénès has included three new "Planet" paintings. If one were trying to situate Raguénès in the lineage of great painters, these smaller-format compositions of colored circles on black backgrounds might evoke such art-historical movements as Suprematism, or Kandinsky's compositions with circles. However, a simple ring around a sphere reassures the viewer that they are gazing at a representation of planets in space—not at an abstract composition in homage to anyone.

Lastly, an additional small-format painting accompanies the two series on show, and acts as an antechamber between them, a waiting room for divers and astronauts. An image of a Modernist bedroom set has undergone the Raguénès treatment—parts of the furniture have been painted out to leave only a bed and a commode. A green light built from rough brushstrokes permeates this "Room Of The Octopus". However, just as the seascapes and celestial compositions are devoid of life, the tentacular creature in question is nowhere to be seen.

In 1927—inspired by Hindu mystic Ramakrishna—French writer Romain Rolland first used the term "oceanic feeling" to refer to "a sensation of eternity", a feeling of "being one with the external world as a whole" in a letter to Sigmund Freud. The latter went on to unfold the concept as a fragmentary leftover of consciousness possessed by the infant who has not yet differentiated himself or herself from other people and things. Raguénès' paintings of never ending waterscapes, as deep as they are wide, and views of an edgeless firmament bring up this feeling of oneness. Although the paintings contain no visible trace of (human) life, viewers are both contained in and engulfed by the images. We belong to the sea and the sky, be it the primordial soup from whence we came, or the star stuff from which we are made: the carbon, nitrogen and oxygen atoms in our bodies that were created in previous generations of stars billions of years ago.

When the sun has set, and the door to the gallery is closed, Loïc Raguénès' paintings are left to their own devices. In our absence, they continue to interact during the night, as the planets' gravitational pull creates the waves, and perhaps the Octopus, ushered by the reassuring tide, returns safely to its room to sleep in its Bauhaus bed.

Ailsa Cavers