

# Sarah Bechter

## Are You The Monument Yourself?

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Madrid

*A balustrade halts between us, charging us to stand still, to endure...*

With a dreamy sensibility, Austrian artist Sarah Bechter's work brings us into a world where figures, subjects and painting hover between possibilities, suspended in the thresholds of societal roles and the structures sustaining them. In this liminal space, a disquieting question is raised: *Are You the Monument Yourself?*

The question is neither rhetorical nor passive. It compels reflection on the ways in which the very same systems that construct and sustain meaning, difference and experience, are continually perpetuated in the immanence of self-definition. To be the monument, is to be either visible or invisible, to resound or remain silent. In Bechter's first and new solo exhibition at Pedro Cera, the monument is equally structure and symbol, designed to support and embody ideals dictated by power. But where does it reside?

For the French philosopher Michel Foucault, power is relational. It "is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere"<sup>1</sup>, emerging only *in* and *through* relations. Its effects are distributed, enacted through the subtle disciplining of bodies, an ever-shifting flow constantly moving through society. A *des-centered* force, it belongs to no one and nothing in particular, produced instead by a choice over the course of a specific interaction.

In the medium-format and screen paintings populating the gallery, power is asserted in its ambiguity, both resisted and personified. The works appear as bodies, their individuality first proclaimed in Bechter's process-oriented ethos: an approach of organic spontaneity, with pauses, rhythm, and mutual exchange. Transformed into independent agents with desires, needs and voice, each painting seeks to subvert the traditional binary roles imposed in the world (subject/object), escaping the rigid designations often associated with patriarchal structures: who gets space to be seen and heard. Between effect and affection, akin to a conversation, painting and subject stand face to face, both reacting to and discovering one another.

Through unexpected encounters, Bechter's works turn into active players in a game of relational dynamics, operating far from its socially attributed passiveness. They observe, move, shift and resist, drawing viewers into their emotional spirals, pushing and pulling them with cryptic smiles, and making them recognize their bodily existence in the space. Posing to serve, moving caryatids unstably hold up the weight; figures leap over the breach; elongated limbs embrace the cacophony of silent hums; fountains overflow beyond restrained authority; transparent figures sketch games of hide and seek. Dancing, folding and reaching, their playfulness destabilizes rigidity, hitting at the possibility of undermining power through its very subversion: to fully be other than the expected.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Volume I. Pantheon Books, 1978: p. 93.

Beholder and painting thus exist in a perpetual process of metamorphosis - always changing, always responding. More than surfaces, the works may be described as what German philosopher Markus Gabriel terms *fields of sense*<sup>2</sup>: autonomous yet interconnected compositions that demand interaction. Asserting their presence, each one of Bechter's paintings embodies a duality of concealment and revelation, addressing the viewer in disruptive dynamics of contemplation by demanding attention and participation in their countless spatial and psychological possibilities.

Both works and titles - open ended and often phrased as questions or statements - echo the performative nature of (artistic) identity, reflecting on shared experiences where power is negotiated. Contradictions - between presence and absence, private and public, control and freedom - are allowed to coexist, as remnants of a desire to resist the rigidity of immutable frameworks. Almost as mirrors, each painting captures the ways we carve ourselves into the world and shape the spaces for others to emerge.

*To jump over the balustrade, in the end...*

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<sup>2</sup> Markus Gabriel, *The Power of Art*, 2020. Polity Books.