

Kai Matsumiya

Zoe Pettijohn Schade

The Hard Problem

May 11 – June 17, 2023

Opening Thursday, May 11, 6-8pm

Zoe Pettijohn Schade's third solo exhibition at Kai Matsumiya Gallery introduces her new body of work, *Attempts at Self-Organization* following the *Crowds* series. She continues to expand and explore the scientific, art historical and philosophical aspects of pattern, including cellular structures, the physics that compel patterns to form, the mathematical structure of information, and the history of feminism. Her lifelong repertoire of work rests on the premise that the *pursuit* of form, repetition, organization, and its arrangements are as vitally important and determining as the *finality* of the image itself.

The *Crowds* series was directly inspired by anonymous 18th century textile painters, all of whom painted in gouache for the purpose of setting prototypes for textiles. They could be described as pioneering proto-industrial laborers originating from various sites in France. It is not ascertained whether the first textile painters were predominantly men or women, but one could surmise that the gradual breaking of feudalism provided an opening for women laborers in the new mode of production in transition amidst dissolution of the guilds. Eventually many textile painters were women; anonymous artists Pettijohn Shade proudly describes as her "ancestors". The role of pattern in the *Crowds* series demonstrated how laws govern structural manifestations, including the substructures, in what the artist describes in the "societal sense", where the dynamics of resistance and obedience fade in, pop out, repeat, and pulsate in a fashion where the first or last beat may not be certain.

The visual manifestations of questions about whether patterns are, could be, or ought to be obedient or subversive to a greater authority are explored in the exhibitions *Crowds* and then *Shifting Sets*. The images she employs are all made from observation: loose feathers that lose vibrancy from her garden, monkeys whose expressions are frozen in death from the Natural History Museum, which are layered over candy-colored tombstones, providing a peekaboo of death amidst the layering hierarchies. The cumulative effect, as critic John Yau has described it, is a consciousness of how it is "one thing to get lost in a meticulous, intricate work of overlapping abstract patterns, and quite another to have it look back at you." One looks at the world, but the world looking back could be something else. Yet the mirror between material reality and consciousness inevitably produces asymmetries, ruptures, mischievous illusions and patterns, and emergent or vitiated subjectivities.

The current exhibition title, *The Hard Problem*, refers to the question of how physical matter gives rise to consciousness. She employs mirrored devices in the shapes of platonic solids (the cube, pyramid, dodecahedron, as well as one formed from hexagons), which then generate new forms when an element is placed within the angled mirrors. For example, a feather dropped within a

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mirrored pyramid is reflected in the angled planes and is transformed into an iris-shaped subject, and the feathery fronds coagulate into a single otherworldly and beastly entity, like an angel fetus. The specific geometry of these mirrored devices give rise to a series of images, which are drawn and painted from observation. These join other images, often recalling elemental states of matter, like bits of minerals, geometric rock formations, new vegetal growth, while others recall matter in the process of forming, like Rorschach paintings, and all have their own specific form of mirrored repetition. The foundational layer of all the paintings is marbled with a variation of the traditional sunspot or tiger's eye pattern, in which potash added to the paint produces what looks like little explosions or mitosis.

The exhibition will display in classical fashion twenty-six drawings and paintings of individual elements that lead up to nine paintings, each roughly 18"x22", which become increasingly complex and layered, a culmination of four years of focused work. These nine paintings explore the possible dynamics between the elements as they move and interact according to how their intrinsic properties dictate the way they can repeat and achieve order. We encourage our visitors to examine the relationships between the works as they become more complex. Going forward, Pettijohn Schade will make about one large painting per year that will include all the elements in the series and focus on a particular dynamic in how they are interacting. Each of these large works will be honored with solo exhibitions until her endeavor for *Attempts at Self Organization* comes to a finality, like a backdrop of a candy-colored winking tombstone.

Zoe Pettijohn Schade lives and works in Boston, MA. Recent group exhibitions include *Weathering* at Kai Matsumiya Gallery, New York, NY; *Our Secret Fire* at Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY; *Less is a Bore: Maximalist Art & Design*, curated by Jenelle Porter, Institute for Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; *deCordova New England Biennial 2019*, curated by Sarah Monstross, deCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA; and *Looking Back / The 10th White Columns Annual*, curated by Matthew Higgs, White Columns, New York, NY. Pettijohn Schade was granted the Blanche E. Colman Award by the Bank of New York Mellon in 2020. In 2012-13, she traveled to France on a Fulbright U.S. Research Scholars Grant to work with a collection of 18th century textile paintings and presented a solo exhibition at the Mona Bismarck American Center for Art and Culture in Paris.

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