

Iva Gueorguieva's Paintings / Catalogue Essay

In January 2025, at the Milton Resnick and Pat Passlof Foundation in NYC, Iva Gueorguieva's two-sided muslin and gauze painting, *Kukeri: Eclipse*, 120x80, 2024, (side 1), unfurls majestically down from a dowel that is attached high up on the wall. *Kukeri: Eclipse*'s expanse of muslin hangs loosely and freely, inches from the wall. A second Gueorguieva painting, *Fisherman*, 24x35, 2024, is acrylic and gauze on a piece of canvas pinned to the wall. Gueorguieva's paintings, especially the large one, being that it is not on a stretcher, invite very close inspection. Since no guards stop me, I view *Kukeri: Eclipse*, with my nose right up to the painting. In Abstraction by Any Other Name, Part II, 11/15/24 – 02/08/25, curated by Dan Cameron, other paintings in the show are on stretchers, and I am prompted to consider how stretchers dramatically affect how I physically interact with paintings.

In Abstraction by Any Other Name, I stand at least four feet away from the paintings on stretchers. I don't want to get closer, because I want to view the entirety of compositional abstract paintings that look very similar to the photographic images in the catalogue. *Kukeri: Eclipse* is a different experience in person than in the picture. The painting doesn't function as an image as it appears in the catalogue, because the physical surface of the painting, the satiny, densely woven muslin terrain that is creased, cut, bubbled with water marks and touched all over by Gueorguieva, cannot be seen in a photograph. The breathing, infinitely mutable muslin IS the painting. The painting itself has a specific, but different, physical reality than the floor beneath it or the wall it hangs against. In many ways, *Kukeri: Eclipse* is less abstract than the stretched paintings that surround it, which are doubly abstract, because canvas covers the stretchers, and also, when painted, present abstract painted images that often involve a degree of spatial illusion.

Frank Stella's black stripe paintings from the 1960s, on thick stretchers, sought to rid painting of spatial illusion, to make painting a literal object on the wall, but the black paintings' graphic images were painted on canvases that were tightly stretched over physical stretchers. The objecthood of Stella's black paintings is an illusion, because the stretchers are hidden by canvas. Lucio Fontana's slashed and punctured paintings from the 1960s are exceedingly interesting because they acknowledge the mysterious space between the plane of the canvas and the wall. There have also been historically important art movements like the French 1960's art movement, Supports/Surfaces, which was dedicated to the deconstruction of traditional stretched paintings. Ed Clark sometimes left the corners of his paintings loose, unstretched, which emphasizes the canvas as a material aspect of the painting, independent of the image painted on the front. However, Gueorguieva's stretcher-less works are distinct from the aforementioned attempts to expand abstract painting.

Gueorguieva's paintings on muslin and other materials are a continuation of hundreds of drawings of all sizes made on a variety of papers and other surfaces. Her drawings possess a remarkable resemblance to Lucio Fontana's figurative/abstract drawings, some of which are reproduced in the 2022 two-volume Skira catalogue of his ceramic sculptures. In Gueorguieva's drawings, her searching, mutable, manically active lines are

made with graphite and colored pencils, pastels, markers, pens, brushes and sticks. Images of animals, nature and people appear and disappear into tangles of abstract marks and erasures. In her works on canvas and muslin, marks are made with drawing materials and also sewn with ragged zig-zagging lines, often in colored thread. Gauze shapes are glued on to the surface and sometimes torn off. In Gueorguieva's paintings, images are simultaneously made and unmade, coalesce and disperse. Gueorguieva usually works on her paintings on the floor. Her paintings have an unusual quality of time. Marks are wild and fast, but the overall paintings are slow, quiet, displaying a thickened quality of time.

For about ten years, Gueorguieva has been working with trained dancers who literally dance with her unstretched muslin paintings. These concerts, accompanied by fascinating original live electronic music performances by Matthew McGarvey, frequently take place out of doors with the paintings blowing in the wind, and the dancers wrapping themselves in the paintings, sometimes even tearing the paintings with their bodies. Tears and holes in her paintings are not a problem, because Gueorguieva's paintings are easy to patch. The patches become additional details of surface. The more her paintings are used, the more beautiful they become, receptive not only to being looked at, but also to being touched. In the past, art dealers have insisted that Gueorguieva stretch her paintings so that they can be conventionally hung on a wall. When this happens, her paintings are irrevocably changed. Delicate bubbles and subtle creases in the muslin are lost. Material details disappear. When stretched, her paintings become, like other stretched paintings, finished. Unstretched, Gueorguieva's paintings keep producing themselves, inviting further touching. Since she does not work towards a final image that would, typically and hierarchically, dominate the materials that make images, the materiality of each painting becomes image.

One is free to hang out with Gueorguieva's paintings without looking at them, because like other aspects of reality, there is so much to see in her paintings that you will never see it all, so you might as well relax, hang out, dance with the paintings. Iva Gueorguieva's stacks of unstretched paintings restore time. Dona Nelson, January 19th, 2025