

SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY

EMILY GERNILD – In the Eye

Exhibition: September 11 – October 10, 2026

Fragile Seeing

Emily Gernild's paintings are imbued with a dark intensity. In her paintings, which are generally quite large, the Danish artist (born in Odense in 1985) moves along the threshold of an abstractly understood free figuration, which originally draws on vegetable-organic forms and which Gernild increasingly dissolves in the direction of intertwined, sprawling spaces of colour. *In the Eye*, her fourth solo show since 2018 at SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY, brings together nine new paintings (all from 2026), where this tendency manifests itself. Whereas earlier works were inspired more clearly by floral motifs, still lifes, and floral landscapes, in current works like *The Cage*, *Egg Portal*, and *Evening Reflection*, the driving forces of the organic themselves seem to move more into focus.

This development is based on a longer process: as early as 2023, Gernild stated that she “lost all interest in the landscape shaped by human beings, I was only interested in the sprouts, shoots, seedpods, in the plants, in the way they lead a life of their own”. This does not just concern questions of motif; at the time, Gernild also began to view painting itself as organic and integrate that into her process. This meant that in the act of painting, intuitively placed marks and forms of paint “resulted in something new, as if from leftovers, waste, something discarded that serves as a nutrient for new life, new forms”.¹

This tendency to grasp painterly texture through the idea of “composting” still lifes, as it were, is revealed in the new paintings by an increased penchant for organic abstraction and more complex – and at the same time more open – pictorial spaces. The changed appearance of the painterly surfaces also suggests a turn to existential questions. The statement quoted above still “fits well to my current practice”, says Gernild, but since then “it has taken on a different dimension as I’ve been working and have gained more experience as an artist, as a person, and as a woman in this world. I think I’ve allowed the madness, the wildness, the anger, the erotic, and the sensual to seep into my practice.”²

In the new paintings, we can still make out traces of nature such as fruit, stems, or leaves, but, in addition to a greater interpretative openness, the paintings have often also taken on dark, melancholy characteristics: in *The Cage* for example, a quite recognizable, transparently painted lemon corpus floats in the lower part of the painting. Before that, six

¹ Both quotations are from: Emily Gernild, *Paintings 2022 2023* [cat.], SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY, Berlin, 2023; p. 57/58.

² This and the following quotation: Emily Gernild in an email to the author, August 25, 2026.

round balls or fruit of the same size, which in their shades of anthracite, grey, and beige, already seem less plant-like. A much larger round figure, resting above, with sulphur-yellow indentations, seems in the composition like a floating burden, and even larger circular segments in warm shades of grey close off the pictorial space in sections towards the top. The pale beige intermediate zone opens up the pictorial space towards the back, lightening the composition. In *Apple Roots*, with its shades of reddish-brown, pink and orange, a completely different colour temperature dominates: looming vertically, a root-like or stem-like element, reaching out to the left with multiple arms, runs through the painting. All around, variously shaped fields and colour shapes are docked; and a blackish-brown dark zone arches over everything, perhaps protectively, or maybe to seal it off. Two fruits can be made out up in the tree – they could be oranges – and other elements could be interpreted as vaguely naturalistic, but the painting has no need of that. On the contrary, for Gernild such moments of reference, where the recognizable always already also belongs to another sphere, are sufficient. “I’m not really interested in flowers anymore”, she explains, “they serve more as a kind of recognisable and inviting aesthetic form from which one can access the work.”

With this power of ambivalence, Gernild opens her paintings to existential dimensions. “Melancholy, anger, grief, and destruction”, she says, “are the emotions that I explore through my paintings and the materials I use.” The exhibition title *In the Eye* is a further personal reference that can only be called existential. At the end of last year, Gernild was diagnosed with the eye disease CSCR: fluids collect under the retina, leading to clouded vision and dark spots in one’s field of vision. On the one hand quite frightening, but Gernild integrates this into her painterly practice. “It made me take an interest in the eye”, she says, “which sees in more ways than one. From Hannah Arendt to Plato’s allegory of the cave. To the cliché that the eye is the mirror of the soul.” Confronted with this existential mixture of fear and curiosity, Edvard Munch (1863–1944) comes to mind, who in his later years suffered from an episode of retinal bleeding. While he documented his impaired vision in meticulously painted studies, he captured his fears of his dark-spotted vision in haunting scenes. So when circular volumes float through a purplish-blue colour space in paintings like *Evening Reflection*, they might be reminiscences of earlier fruit still lifes, but we might also think of a dark sun. With its seemingly strange, mistaken colours, *Evening Reflection*, like Gernild’s other paintings, also addresses the fragility and beauty of vision on a deeper level.

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