

# SARAH GODTHART

## INTIMACY IN EPHEMERA

By Rose Hobart

Austrian-based artist Sarah Godthart's personal statement mirrors her work. It is a sparse but telling poem, a haiku by an unknown Japanese poet.

Written in German it states:

*Des Menschen Herz  
ist unergründlich –  
doch in meiner Heimat  
blühen die Blumen  
wie eh und jeh.*

Roughly, this translates to:

**The human heart  
is unfathomable—  
But in my home  
the flowers bloom  
as ever.**

Consider Godthart's art itself to be a home cosmos of sorts—to her, her subjects, and her viewers. Her portraits, composed with watercolor and pastels, are a space in which her subjects bloom with sweeping strokes of rosy pinks and hydrangea blues, displaying the striking unfathomability of the human heart. There is a sense of intimacy achieved in Godthart's sparsity—an intense knowing of her subjects is conveyed in the thinly applied colors and reduced formal signifiers that compile her figures.

As a self-taught painter based in Vienna, Godthart has achieved a style completely her own. Several of her newest pieces, on display at the Broadway Gallery in New York City, further the artistic efforts of her earlier paintings, but pare back the vibrant chromatic omnipresence characteristic of previous work. In these five new paintings, all portraying human figures, Godthart moves further towards the

minimal in leaving more blank space on the canvas and painting facial and bodily features with less definition than seen before. In the painting, *On the Run*, two presumably male figures face the viewer, with their features signified solely by loose brush strokes, by fluently dripping, effortlessly applied watercolor. The nickel titan yellow background seeps into the face of the figure closest to the picture plane, recalling the early Fauvism of Matisse but with less concern for viewerly emotion brought about by shock, and instead lending more attention to the way the color illuminates the figure's dejected aura. With his lips pouted together and eyes downcast, he emotes a sense of loss or emotional strife; the other figure in the work, painted entirely with grayish-blue, gives this loss a figurative grounding point.

The sparsely applied but poignant color that composes these figures without outline or definition is apparent in the other works being shown at the gallery, and renders the sadness of the subjects to an even greater extent. The blushing lips again stand out in two of her portraits of female figures. Both are pursed into looks of dissatisfaction and self-rejection. In *Murren*, the figure longingly looks outward from the confinements of the painting with blurred cobalt drops of color for eyes. A vertical line of charcoal stands in for her nose, and a wide stroke of gauzy pink sweeps over an eye, a lucid colorization of her seemingly desperate confusion. There is a striking ephemeral quality to Godthart's recent works, especially in this piece. A simultaneous sense of knowing and longing to know these spliced figures' creates a gorgeous tension in Godthart's paintings—through the ephemerality of their features, the loose but carefully applied colors and sparse lines, just enough information is provided for a viewer to grasp a sense of feeling from the figures. But when one looks at the painting more closely, they find themselves wanting to draw in the rest of the figure's features, to create a fuller picture of where this painted being is coming from, and where they are going. Godthart establishes an intimate space in which the viewer and subject interact on an emotional and artistic level. Though the works are sparse and leave much to the imagination, a home is constructed within them in which the flora of the unfathomable grows. □

Courtesy of the artist.

