

*A Door Left Ajar*

A group show by Diambe, Michael Ho & Thiago Hattner

kurimanzutto new york

May 21, 2025

Text by Connor Spencer

What remains after the event settles into the recesses of memory. It takes on strange shapes, multiplies emotions, proliferates forms of knowledge and forgetting. The artists of *A Door Left Ajar*--Diambe, Thiago Hattner, and Michael Ho--appropriate the visual vocabulary of landscape as they address the remainder that vibrates within memory. Ostensibly concerning the natural world, landscape paintings in the Western art historical tradition are also inevitably about the human subject who organizes the scene before them. Such paintings have been ideological and "academic" exercises, yes, but they also make and remake modes of feeling, relating, and remembering. Familiar yet strange, the visions conjured by this cohort of painters follow the uncanny logic of dreams. Their paintings absent the human figure, yet they nonetheless haze into focus as assemblages of memory, as portals into an unconscious that is both individual and collective.

Associated with portraiture rather than landscape, the vertical orientation of many of these works allude to their interest in our subjective relationship with the surround. Consider Diambe's splashy vistas, paintings that draw from natural motifs yet tilt into fantastical palettes and compositions. Abbreviated, squat brushstrokes of tempura skate across rather than saturate Diambe's canvases. Their blocking of color dispels the continuity of the image, which does not quite resolve into a settled form. Rather, Diambe's visions sediment over time--brushstroke by brushstroke, recollection by recollection--and rhyme with the geological strata splayed across these paintings. Diambe invites us to consider our place within larger processes of ecological transformation that extend beyond the time of the human.

Like Diambe, Thiago Hattner hews to a vertical format that unsettles the spatial coordinates of traditional landscape painting. Each painting is comprised of multiple compositional units, typically a series of rectangles and squares which may or may not contain sharply divergent images. In one painting, a jagged line resembling the torn edge of a sheet of paper slices through the center of the canvas. Floating above three atmospheric fields of color are the ghostly outlines of flowers. Their forms resemble dry patches on rain-splattered wood, silhouettes formed by objects removed after a storm. Haunting the painting as an absence that is at once a presence, the spectral imprint of the flowers introduces the passage of time into the composition.

Michael Ho straddles this line between the personal and social as he meditates on historical processes that induce feelings of liminality and displacement. Resembling less landscapes than labyrinths of memory, Ho's paintings draw from his experiences as a queer, second-generation Chinese immigrant in Europe; they work through the impersonality of histories of migration, cultural transmission, and national mythologization that indelibly mark the individual. Ho takes advantage of the porousness of the canvas, pushing paint through the back of the fabric and working up layers of color that produce ghostly, nearly inverted patterns on the reverse side. On the "front" of the canvas, Ho then paints in precise, stark detail—a flash of clarity in the blur of unsettled time and place. Take, for instance, *Der der die Zukunft pflückte* (2025), in which a kind of exchange or showcase takes place in which one set of hands cradles a set of beads while another reaches towards them. We observe these hands through what could be a set of leaves floating on the surface of water, a fragmentary glimpse that attests to the limits of our knowledge. Additionally, using carved jade slides inserted into a carousel projector, *Astral Projections* (2025) opens passages in which the light filters through layers of mineral, history, and cosmological association, gesturing toward what lies beyond articulation.

There is something incalculable in the works of each of these painters. Collectively, they offer sensorial pathways through geography and history; they conjure images which gleam through the interstices of official narratives and the impositions of order from above. Through their mark-making practices, these painters compose and decompose in the same gesture, employing the idiom of landscape towards their own ends. In their tactile qualities, these works recall the lingering sensation of a touch and attune us to the histories encoded within gesture itself. If these artists offer portals to other configurations of feeling and seeing, they also remind us of the clouded insight that was, impossibly, always already buried within us