

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

Gene Mann

March 20 – April 26, 2014

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 20th, 6 – 8 pm

Making her New York debut, the French-Swiss artist Gene Mann will present a selection of her exuberantly expressive, figurative-abstract, mixed-media works in a solo exhibition at Andrew Edlin Gallery, which will open on March 20th. Providing an overview of her work in various formats, Mann's show will offer a summary of the themes and art-making techniques this mainly self-taught artist has explored in recent years. Normally a resident of Carouge, a town next to Geneva, Switzerland, Mann is currently spending time near Girona in the Catalonia region of northeastern Spain, where several of the works in the exhibition were made.

Born in Grenoble, in southeastern France, Mann moved to Paris as a teenager and fell in with a community of musicians. In 1980 she moved to Geneva, where she began making art after covering the walls and ceilings of her home with hand-painted designs. Around that time, a local exhibition of Goya drawings made a big impression on her. "It left me in tears, it was so moving," she told a magazine. Practicing as an interior decorator and auditing art-school classes, Mann developed her own mode of making semi-abstract images. Those pictures, which appeared in such series as *Tendres humains* (*Tender Humans*) and *Exquises turbulences* (*Exquisite Turbulences*), and in her ongoing production of *Petits carrés* (*Little Squares*, or small, abstractly painted pieces of cardboard) are rich in suggested visual textures and in real, physical textures, too.

A few years ago, Mann presented her work at Geneva's famed Galerie Jan Krugier, whose eponymous founder had once observed, "A drawing is the first cry of humanity. [...] It goes back to something deep and primitive."

In fact, much of Mann's art may be seen as a celebration of the primordial act of mark-making. Many of her works, with their inky splotches, patches of impasto and zigzag strokes, appear to share affinities with ancient writing systems or with the gestural bravura of classic abstract expressionism. They reflect a pure creative impulse, unaffected by critical theory, that is found in *art brut*, or "raw art" to use the French term that refers to the creations of non-academically trained artists who work outside the social-cultural mainstream. Mann admires outsider art but does not try to imitate it. The real subject of her work, with its references to the human figure and use of an abstract visual language to convey ambiguous thoughts and emotions, is the raw energy of artistic creativity.

In her first show at Andrew Edlin Gallery, Mann will present groups of her multi-colored, abstract *Petits carrés* as well as larger, more monochromatic, mixed-media works.

These new creations bring together calligraphic mark-making and semi-abstract depictions of mysterious, lumbering forms that evoke the spirit of prehistoric picture-making on millennia-old cave walls as well as that of urban graffiti and surrealist “automatic writing.”

“To produce these works,” the artist explains, “I made monoprints that were then incorporated into these larger compositions. I regard these works as maps of the intangible zones in which we dream and in which memories emerge and disappear. In making them, I’ve deepened my understanding of my materials and of scale, and of my awareness of the energy that literally fills the space of each picture or the spaces that make up a particular composition.”

For all their rich textures and thickets of urgent, overlapping lines, there is also a mixture of the ambiguous and the meditative in Mann’s art that feels warm and alluring. Her simple images of enigmatic figures offer reminders of each human being’s vulnerability at the same time that her freewheeling abstractions celebrate the irrepressible act of making a lasting, personal mark, a gesture that emphatically says, “I am alive and I am here.”