

## **Sincerely yours**

*With Sincerely yours, Lindsmyr positions various parameters of the written signature: as language – symbolic and expressive, and as a bureaucratic, political, and social marker of subjectivity, in a negotiation between expressivity and readability. Deliberately deconstructing her own gestures, across contexts ranging from childhood drawings to legal documents, she probes the signature's complex relationship to notions of 'the self', its invocations in painting, and role as a core signifier of authenticity and value.*

On March 1st, 1974, Éditions Seuil publishes Julia Kristeva's state doctorate thesis in literature from the University of Paris-Vincennes: *La Révolution de langage poétique; L'avant-Garde a la fin du XIXE Siecle, Lautreamont et Mallarmé*. Ten years later, a shortened English translation is published by Columbia University Press under the title *Revolution in Poetic Language*. With the thesis Kristeva offers an account on the acquisition of language and hence the constitution of the *speaking subject* – a process which manifests via the concepts of *the semiotic* and *the symbolic*. These concepts are to become cornerstones of the thinking of the later celebrated linguist and psychoanalyst and of great importance for entire fields of research.

The symbolic is the position of already acquired language: where the orders and rules of language have been agreed upon. Within psychoanalytic theory the symbolic is associated with the paternal and power (having the phallus); as being formed into language also means being formed into a set of structures through which you read yourself and your surroundings. The semiotic is the position before language-acquisition. This is where we first enter as new-borns. However, certain aspects of non-verbal language belonging to the semiotic also accompany us throughout life. At this stage, we are closely dependent on our caretakers; driven by our needs and senses. It is a 'material', movement, and sound-oriented position, where distinctions are not yet made between the self and the other.

Transitioning from the semiotic into the symbolic is a process of acquiring language, which also entails being shaped into and under a set of overarching arrangements. It is a matter of establishing borders – around the self, the other, concepts, and ideas – learning how to separate between one thing and the other. This transition plays out in an oscillation between rejection (abjection) and incorporation – and through what has been termed *the mirror stage*. The latter concept entails learning to recognize the movements and borders of the self and the other, through a 'mirroring surface'. A central aspect of the mirror stage is to recognize the self as other – as a distant other to be observed: a simultaneously self-affirming and self-alienating experience.

While not the first to refer to the symbolic, neither to the mirror stage, Kristeva's core argument lies in her understanding of the semiotic and its presence as a continuous element embedded in language and communication. In this, Kristeva establishes the subject – also from a developmental perspective – as being in constant flux between the semiotic and the symbolic. The subject goes through a continuous process of abjection and incorporation – passing through the mirror stage over and over again – and through this is able to establish new borders and frameworks for meaning-making. Through her theories Kristeva de-stabilizes the conception of the symbolic (power) as a fixed position and rather claims the subject to be a 'subject in crisis'. In so doing, she underlines the subject's performativity and fluidity in relation to language: the subject can resist the symbolic, regress, and enter anew.

In the mid 2010s, art theorist and writer Isabelle Graw publishes a series of essays on what she calls *vitalist projections* in painting (see: *The Love of Painting*, *Thinking Through Painting*, and *Painting beyond Itself* – all published by Sternberg Press). With *vitalist projections* she refers to the subject-like qualities that can be (and often have been) ascribed to painting – which she traces as being due to the *indexicality* of painting. Indexical marks can be explained as the traces of an absent author; marks pointing towards an act made by someone or something. The indexical mark is an established concept, and in relation to the ideas of Julia Kristeva, belongs to the semiotic sphere. Most, if not all artistic practices contain indexical aspects, however, according to Graw the indexical holds a certain presence in painting, often posing as a main constituent of the work. Through these marks the painting could arguably be experienced as carrying the ghostlike presence of its absent author. Filtered through Marxian ideas of 'living labour', Graw further connects this indexical aspect of painting to the medium's specific position in the context of an art market: *Painting, therefore, generates the illusionary impression that it is possible to grasp a fiber of the living labor that was mobilized for it.*<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, the painting could be regarded as a surface mirroring the living, moving, thinking, labouring subject.

Graw suggests the painting as a quasi-subject. With regards to its indexicality, the painting can be viewed as an object saturated again and again with subjectivity through each mark. A saturation inflicted with time and repetition, which also ties to the ideas of art historian and writer David Joselit: *One of the marvels of modern painting is that this tension between marking and storing time remains present on its surfaces, since its constituent marks, which are laid down over time, are always simultaneously available to vision.*<sup>2</sup>

The project *Sincerely yours* started in the spring of 2023, during a few months spent in New York, and have since been developed over the course of my residency at *Cité Internationale des Arts*. In its final form the project will consist of a series of large-scale paintings and a longer piece of writing. For the painting process I have collected my own signatures from different occasions throughout my life: everything from childhood drawings to legal documents. These are enlarged and made into stencils: used as and combined with gestures in the building up of the work. The method is an exploration of the slip between the expressive gesture and the linguistic sign – through the signature – and its readability and place within the context of painting. The works play with layers, textures, and transparency – allowing the signatures, or fragments of signatures, to appear at different measure. It engages the overlaps between painterly and psychoanalytic discourses, and what it could mean to create a sense of self through a gesture: signified, or mirrored through a flat surface. A process possible to place as much in relation to painting, as to the mirror, the paper, or the digital screen.

*Rebecca Lindsmyr (b.1990) is a painter working in the intersections of painterly discourses and psychoanalytic, linguistic, and post-structuralist thought. Through a diverse painterly approach, her work explores the construction of concepts of self and other within and through painting. In her practice, the painting acts as a possible mirror of or stand-in for a subject – in a linguistic and affective play of signifying chains. Rebecca graduated with a Master in Fine Art from Malmö Art Academy (SE) in 2021, and previously holds a BA (Hons) in Fine Art: Painting and Printmaking from Glasgow School of Art (UK). Apart from her arts education she completed courses in Gender Studies, History, History of Ideas, Art Theory, and Writing. She has recently been awarded a One Year Working Grant from The Swedish Arts Grants Committee (2023); The Ellen Trotzig Grant for Painting from Malmö Art Museum (2022); The Anne-Marie Hökerberg-Hecht Foundation Grant from The Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts (2022). She is represented by Nils Staerk in Copenhagen (DK), where she presented her first solo exhibition in 2022.*

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1 Isabelle Graw, 'The Value of Liveliness; Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy', *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg, 2016) pp.79-101 p.99

2 David Joselit, 'Marking, Scoring, and Speculating (on Time)', *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg, 2016) pp.11-20 p.14