

PARALLAX HELIO

FABIOLA MENCHELLI

February 15 – March 22, 2025

Artist Reception:

Thursday, February 20th, 5:00 – 8:00 pm

Remarks at 6:30 pm



Marshall Gallery presents the solo exhibition "Parallax Helio" featuring new works by Mexico City-based artist Fabiola Menchelli (b. 1983, Mexico). A reception for the artist will be held on Thursday, February 20th from 5:00 – 8:00 pm including remarks in conversation with Julieta Pestarino, Asst. Curator of Photography at the J. Paul Getty Museum. Renowned for her continual progression of camera-less and photo-sculptural processes, Menchelli's work is also the focus of the concurrent solo exhibition "certain silence" on view at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida. Additional works from the artist's earlier series and a project room installation of new work by Lithuanian-American artist Krista Svalbonas will be on view in the adjacent rooms.

The primary focus of the exhibition are ten unique photograms by Fabiola Menchelli made on copper plates through the 19th-century heliogravure process. Unlike photographs composed through the viewfinder of a camera in the field, photograms are created in the studio by carefully arranging objects over the photo-sensitive paper in near-total darkness. Only Menchelli's pre-visualization and technical experience can coax the latent image from the shadows of her darkroom. In this way, her process is more akin to collage or sculpture than to *traditional* photography; One is more likely to find Menchelli in a hazmat suit and gas mask than toting a camera bag and tripod.

On a visual level, the works on view appear as graphic representations of astronomy, a theme explored in earlier series by the artist including *Bajo el Sol Azul (Under the Blue Sun, 2017)* exhibited at Marshall Gallery in 2022. However, in this new series, celestial bodies and glowing circles of light are generated by Menchelli in the darkroom through the manipulation of translucent objects, eclipsing

one another in conjunction with photography's foundational elements of accident and chance. Multiple exposures and solarization techniques further exaggerate the experimental effects. The artist never sees the fruit of this choreographed labor until after the development and fixing processes have stabilized the exposure and it can be brought into the light for viewing. The writer Laura Orozco, a curator and the Director of ESPAC in Mexico City, interestingly notes that by this process of delayed gratification "*Menchelli puts herself in the same site as the viewer, causing a delayering of the values and functions between the creator, the consumer and the object*". Menchelli then transmutes the photograms to copper plates through the laborious technique of heliogravure.

The first and arguably finest mechanical means of photo-reproduction, the heliogravure or "photogravure" process was made famous through the volumes of Camera Work and pioneering artists such as Henry Fox Talbot, Edward S. Curtis, Alfred Stieglitz, and Anne Brigman, among many others as the process gained artistic prominence during the Pictorialism movement at the turn of the 20th century. This period saw the wider acceptance of photography as an artistic practice capable of subjective expression beyond its more rigid foundation as a tool of science for objective recordings. The process uses an acid-bath to etch an image, in this case Menchelli's photograms, into the surface of a copper plate leaving a highly detailed photographic relief. These plates are inked and pressed to produce richly toned intaglio prints though, in line with her atypical approach to the medium, Menchelli is exhibiting the copper plates as one-of-a-kind photographic objects. Produced in collaboration with the celebrated Mexican printmaking studio, El Taller de Mike, the plates radiate her abstract compositions showcasing expert craftsmanship of the highest archival quality.

Beneath the surface, Menchelli's work is fundamentally concerned with exploring alternative modes of observation, dissolving the normative boundaries of artistic practice, and questioning accepted histories within photography and thus society at large. In regards to the "Parallax" pieces on view, these themes are explored through the metaphor of gravitational lens distortion as the series statement clarifies: "*In optics and astronomy, a parallax effect describes an angular deviation of the apparent position of an object, which depends on the location of the observer.*" In the way that a black hole might obscure the perception of distant galaxies, the photogram's collapsing of space and voids of formal information in Menchelli's new work can invite myriad interpretations of their origin and significance. This skillful use and malleable reimagination of traditional photographic processes exemplifies Menchelli's increasingly ambitious output.

Image: Fabiola Menchelli, *Acitti*, 2024. Heliogravure on copper plate, 20 x 16 in. Unique.