JANA EULER

TALKS ABOUT HER "ORGY OF PAINT"



JANA EULER'S PAINTINGS are crowded with symbolically charged motifs—sharks, sockets, slugs, dollar bills, bodily close-ups, and her own fantastical animal, the morecorn. Each stars as the protagonist in its own series of works, and puts us in touch with a different attitude toward reality. Her canvases may seem metaphorical, producing impressions of how it feels to live in our time, but they are also very much about process, material, and technique: What does it mean to paint today?

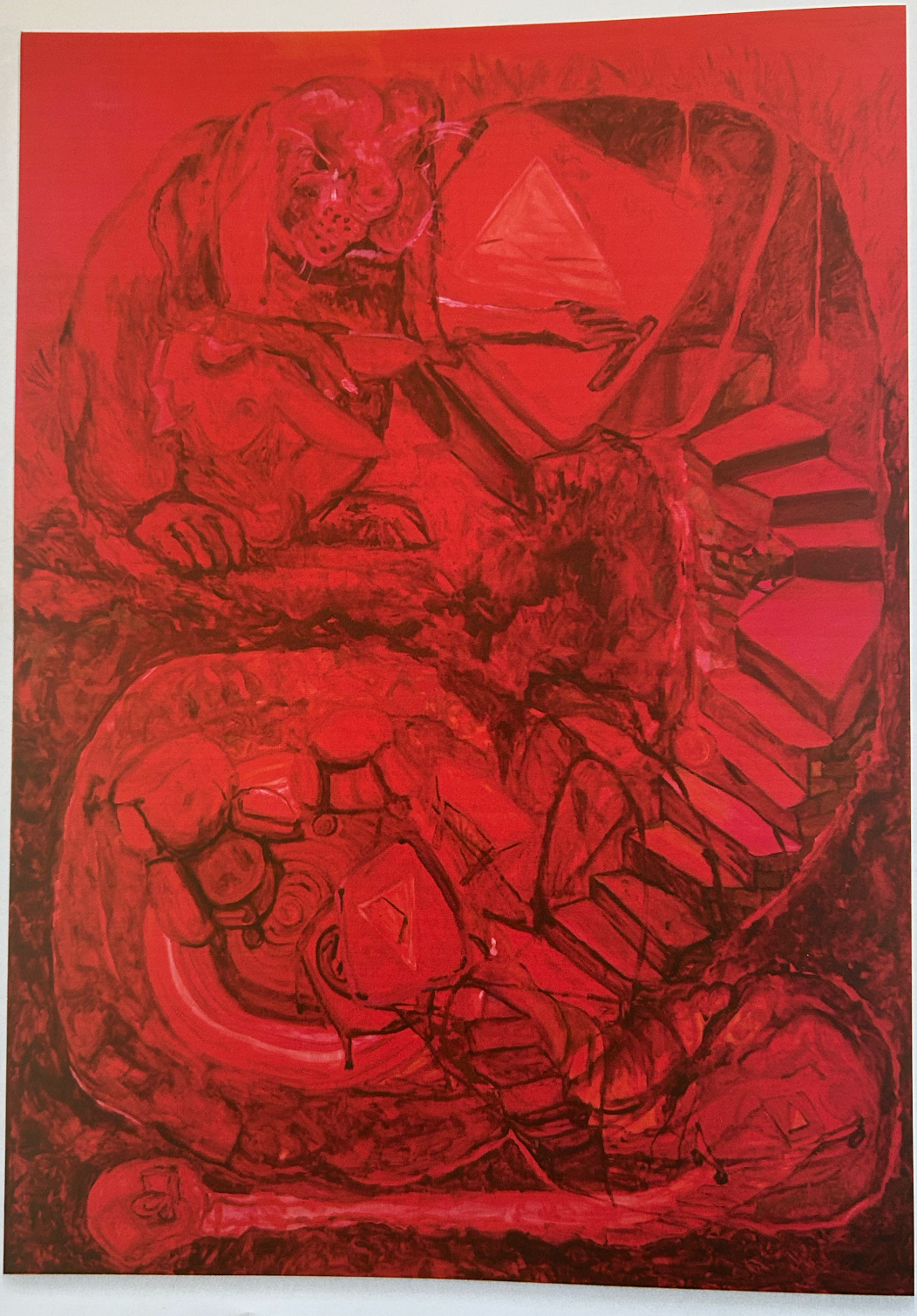
In her latest Greene Naftali exhibition, Euler offered many possible answers. "The center does not fold," which closed last month in New York, invited viewers to make connections between the fourteen paintings that the artist completed in 2025, many with AI in mind. At a time when we're robbed of shared experience by the short-circuiting or self-regulating effects of our devices, Euler employed AI not as a tool, but as a form of imagination. For Euler, everything is always ready to merge with something that it doesn't belong to, continuously synthesizing in seemingly unnatural ways. At the same time, her art remains a porous exchange with the material world: We get something out of it and put something into it. There's a bodily reverberating that is beyond control.

—Bettina Funcke

TO ME, MAKING AN EXHIBITION comes from a *wish to communicate something that I don't know.* You make up your own question, you see it in your way. The title of my show was "The center does not fold." It's inviting, and then it doesn't work. How to imagine a center that doesn't fold? It's sort of resisting or it's wobbling. I think "The center does not hold" is a dark and beautiful sentence, but I wanted to change it a little. It's not taking this confusion about the sentence literally. My version comes from the phrase "*Playboy* centerfold," which I depicted as an actual bunny [*Centerfold*].

We have to contend with extremes all the time. It's exhausting. They're almost unimaginable, but they're real. So I was thinking about the show as a translation of *You are* in *the frame of a painting and then you're* in *the whole show, and then suddenly you're* in *the whole world.* For me, that's part of the title. The extremes are just so loud sometimes you almost can't hear what is in between. It was also important to say that what's in the middle could even be *more* extreme than the outsides. There are rules, but painting goes beyond them. There are exact borders of a painting, but there's a lot of freedom in these exact borders. Or it can open up outside of them.

An exhibition connects very different things: the audience, the room, the works, and time. In the new show, I used all rooms in the gallery. The layout had three parts, and everything was open and circular. You could go in an infinity loop, where the central room is the intersection. The show had a center, but it didn't fold around the center.





Opposite page: **Jana Euler, *Centerfold*, 2025**, oil on canvas, 114¼ × 80¾". Above: **View of "Jana Euler: The center does not fold," 2025–26**, Greene Naftali, New York. From left: *Where the energy comes from, connected*, 2025; *Creative Act (Camera)*, 2025. Photo: Júlia Standovár.

Each work has a lot to do with connection, too. The paint tubes in the studio [*Creative Act (Paint tube)*] are embracing each other, as are the horses [*The fantasy of a highly potent creative act with little participation of human mankind, and the sheer multitude of packages that fly back in return*]. The painting of a giant electrical socket [*Where the energy comes from, connected*] is a symbol for being constantly connected, even if ultimately just with yourself. I never get tired of that question, *Where does the energy come from?*, because it's so general, but I also don't even know if it is a question. Energy, by definition, is about connection.

I like painting in different modes. Every painting in this show spoke a different language, more than in my other exhibitions. I like how the socket came together in the first room with my painting of the big camera [*Creative Act (Camera)*]. They were visible from the street, and then something completely different unfolded when you went inside. I had painted both of these motifs before, but had never shown them together in one room. Just color- and technique-wise they're extremely different from each other: One is dark, the other is light; one acrylic, the other oil; one painted with a brush, the other with an airbrush. And while they're similar because they each show one object, what they communicate is very different, too. The camera is turned around so that we feel we are visualizing something through it, rather than concentrating on our paranoia of being looked at and trying not to be self-conscious. Whereas the socket is connected to itself, functioning like a pacifier.

It's funny to somehow exclude yourself from the making in different ways. I got really into the mood of painting as if I were the paint tubes. The painting of the paint tubes in the studio took me a long time, like eight months or so. It got more and more messy. Now I look at it and I see there's so much going on, this orgy of paint, and it doesn't have anything to do with me anymore. Or I take myself back and paint the dog as if I were AI. What happens when AI takes control? Or the *Playboy* bunny? A lot of people watch phone videos all the time, and I sometimes do too—it's addictive, but not really satisfying. With the bunny, I wanted to make a painting with that attitude, where you almost can't see because it's visually overwhelming. It's more about the fantasy of this huge creative act.

That's why I like making exhibitions. You never know how people see. I could say these things, but it doesn't mean that someone else will see them. *I painted like an AI*: What does that really mean for someone else? It's not a value judgment. It's more like an idea that gives me the energy to finish.

There is a certain energy in New York. It was helpful to go there before making this work, in spring 2024. I brought dollar bills back to Germany in order to paint from them. I was afraid of the directness of making dollar paintings—painting is often connected to money and value, and that takes away other meanings—but money is a reality, so the dollar paintings have a connection to the world. Dollars are made to be printed as often as possible, so making them by hand is absurd. The medium-size dollar painting [*Unfolded Dollar 1*] is so abstract that you don't see letters or numbers. I don't do many abstract paintings, but this is kind of one. What you see *are* the paintings, not reproductions of a dollar. It's very handmade. There's a lot of tension between the five different dollar paintings. By using just this one motif I wanted the painting aspect to be very present and overshadowing its subject.

The owl [*On the way to the studio*] was the first painting in this show that I started, and the most frontal one for sure. I took a photo on my way to the studio and painted the streetscape with an owl on it. It's not a self-portrait, but something that might belong to me; it's not exactly me, but runs toward me. I hung the owl so it was running against the enlarging dollars, almost like two forces running toward each other. The owl represents the drive *to do something*, but then there are other forces.

I really enjoy these different energies together, and also that older motifs still have something to say. Like with the camera and the socket, but especially with the morecorns, which are unicorns with multiple horns. I painted a show of morecorns during Covid and didn't make any more, except one, until three weeks before the shipment to New York, when I realized there was something still missing—new information always comes in. So it's the painting that I know the least. We don't know how last year, 2025, is going to be seen later. In which way would it make sense for these creatures to reappear and have them comment on this show? □

This page: Jana Euler, *Creative Act (Paint Tube)*, 2025, oil on canvas, 98½ × 80 ¼". Opposite page: Jana Euler, *Unfolded Dollar 1*, 2025, oil on canvas, 35⅝ × 82 ¼".