

**PIA FRIES**  
**OUNCE BY OUNCE**

22 March – 10 May, 2024

Opening and artist talk: Friday, 22 March at 6 p.m.

The internationally renowned Swiss artist **PIA FRIES** (b. 1955), who is widely regarded for her unique approach to painting, presents her first solo exhibition at a gallery in Austria, with selections from recent bodies of work in which she branches out into new creative domains.

The “ounce” that appears in the exhibition’s title is a unit of measurement that in many countries is best known as designating a quantity of gold. The ounce as a unit of weight goes back to the Roman Empire. The word derives from the Latin “uncia,” meaning “the twelfth part.” By extension, the title *Ounce by Ounce* symbolizes the careful apportioning, placement, and balancing of nuances of color and tone that are in incessant motion on the body of the picture. Almost as though subject to universal physical laws of their own, the support media are the scenes of a genesis of forces, tensions, volumes, and relative weights that **FRIES** works step by step to array in fascinating constellations. In ongoing action and reaction, in hearing and listening, doing and striving, this process spawns dynamic momentums and surprise effects that endow each work with its “own biography.” To reach its definitive stage, a picture needs to undergo a metamorphosis that is fueled by the relationship between physical material and artist. “I am in service to painting, to colors, so that they can take the stage in all their forms and potentials and speak to us,” she emphasizes.

One central aspect of **FRIES’** oeuvre is her technique, which is unlike any other artist’s. Employing a set of utensils she has built herself such as rakes, spatulas, combs, knives, and various kinds of brushes, she gouges, smooths, piles up, and redistributes the paints. This process is informed by the artist’s own physical strength as she turns, lifts, and shakes the support medium or turns it upside down. In a second phase, she uses a special studio crane to move the larger, heavier formats around and rattle them. The result is an emergent relationship between surface, shape, and color that is influenced by the simultaneity of intention and chance, of order and confusion. Thick and pasty, matt, glossy, layered, glazed, and diluted paints interweave to yield abstract shapes that **FRIES** has for many years combined with the technique of silkscreen printing. Her motifs are often drawn from old master prints, reproductions of which she arranges on the supports.

For this exhibition, the artist has created new works on wood in which vibrantly luminous oranges, reds, yellows, and greens predominate. Groupings and variations of textures, shapes, and colors that would seem to owe their existence to coincidence engender a pulsating dynamic. “There are no solitary colors,” **FRIES** says; “they are always infected by others. They mingle in this or that way, transforming or qualifying each other.”

In the exhibition, an oversized work on paper catches the eye, sprawling over a 33-foot-long wall section. This “Fries frieze”, which derives from a body of works titled *durch sieben siebe (through seven sieves)*, was first on public display in a widely noted solo exhibition of the artist’s work at Kunsthaus Baselland in 2023. **FRIES** here took inspiration from the small-format copperplate engraving *Farnese Hercules* (1592) by Hendrick Goltzius, a Netherlandish painter and graphic artist of the Mannerist period, whom she has engaged in a creative dialogue for some time. Hercules’s mighty frame is extricated from its original context and reinterpreted in a combination of silkscreened reproductions and luminous acrylic paints. The richly contrastive alternation between figuration and reduction, plasticity and flatness, past and present infuses the work with its extraordinary expansive quality. The title *through seven sieves* establishes a metaphorical connection to the technique of silkscreen printing that **FRIES** employs to enlarge the dimensions of her formal vocabulary. In continually broadening and refining her painterly practice, she goes beyond the traditional bounds of her medium, challenging our habits of seeing and confronting us with sights we have never beheld before.

After studying sculpture with Anton Egloff at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Lucerne, **PIA FRIES** switched to the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf, where she completed her studies in painting in Gerhard Richter’s master class. Her work has been shown in major solo exhibitions at Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum Winterthur, the Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, Berlinische Galerie, the Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, and galleries in Europe and the U.S. and has been the subject of a large number of publications. **FRIES** has won numerous awards, and her works are in the collections of prestigious international museums. She has held professorships at the Berlin University of the Arts and the Academy of Fine Arts Munich. The artist lives in Düsseldorf and Lucerne.