

# LIKE A FIRE IN THE SUN

In *Blow-Up*, Thomas (David Hemmings), the photographer protagonist of Michelangelo Antonioni's film, visits the studio of his friend and neighbour Bill (John Castle), an abstract painter. In that scene, Thomas listens as the painter comments on a canvas he made some time ago. Bill points to it and says, "They don't mean anything when I do them — just a mess. Afterwards, I find something to hang on to, like that leg. Then it sorts itself out and adds up. It's like finding a clue in a detective story."

The camera shows the painting: a chaotic mass of shapes and colours in which, if you look carefully enough, a concrete and recognizable element emerges. A detail to hold onto, one that serves as a key or, at the very least, opens up possibilities for ordering the composition retroactively. But what if this were not simply about the well-worn dichotomy between chaos and order, but about erasing the very division between the two?

In 1929, Georges Bataille wrote, on the subject of the *formless* in *Documents*: "A dictionary would begin as of the moment when it no longer provided the meaning of words but their tasks [*besognes*]. Thus, *formless* is not only an adjective with this or that meaning, but a term that declassifies, requiring each thing to have its form."

This project presents new paintings by Javier Arce, Manuel M. Romero, Natalia López de la Oliva, and Alicia Vogel. Their works blur any prior intention that might categorize or limit them: there is an initial chaos — the mark, the gesture, the mess — and only afterwards, in the act of looking, might that fragment emerge, perhaps recognizable, acting as an anchor for many possible narratives.



Alicia Vogel, *Février III*, 2026

I sense that the artists gathered for this project intend to paint the fire-stains on the sun with sulfur. The stain has no definite form; it is an unclassifiable remnant, an accident without a name. The fascination with fire stems from its ceaseless movement and its capacity to excite nearly all the senses at once. The crackling of what burns releases an unbearable smell. While the colours dance, its heat comforts as much as it frightens.

The title of this exhibition proposes an image as a starting point. *Like a Fire in the Sun* evokes a very real risk today: the impossibility of listening and perceiving — that is, of paying attention — within an incessant and enveloping saturation of information and images that subjects our attention to continuous disorientation, preventing us from focusing on or lingering long enough with any detail, even the one that ultimately proves decisive.

It is very difficult to observe a fire within another fire infinitely larger, such as the Sun. It is an almost impossible image. And yet, what matters is precisely to await this possibility. To find a stain whose visibility depends only on a slight difference.

If everything burned in the same way, there would be nothing to see. A fire in the sun ought to be invisible — and yet sometimes a remnant remains: a temperature difference, a distinct density that betrays the presence of something formless and resistant to the saturation that renders everything indistinguishable.



Manuel M. Romero, *Sin título*, 2025-26

The works of Javier Arce, Manuel M. Romero, Natalia López de la Oliva, and Alícia Vogel seem to be arranged in the elongated space of the Mayoral gallery to offer encounters with what has not yet been named. They seem to offer the viewer flashes through which to take pleasure in painting and, after slow observation, to find what overflows and exceeds without submitting to the tyranny of domesticated form — even if this is almost impossible to represent, like a fire within the sun.

According to Bataille, the term *formless* does not describe a quality but rather performs an operation: it declassifies and undoes form without proposing another. It is not chaos as the opposite of order, but an active disruption of the category itself: the stain, the mark, that trace that probably leads nowhere; the fire that dissolves into the sun. The problem is not the absence of light but its excess.

At that point of indetermination, the works of the invited artists articulate a space where stains coexist with the possible, where presence and absence cease to be antagonistic. The remnant remains: that which does not seek to define but to take an extended vacation from the operative and efficient functionality of the sign. To search for clues and look again and again, in order to perceive more clearly, paying closer attention. To linger in the exhibition space and reclaim a place of one's own, standing firm against the blinding saturation.

Francesco Giaveri, curator of the exhibition