Exhibition Images & Slides
Tomm El-Saieh
ICA MIAMI
The dense and immersive paintings of Tomm El-Saieh (b. 1984, Port-au-Prince, Haiti) explore the limits of abstraction. Comprising applied pigments and erasures on canvas, El-Saieh’s paintings evoke networks of marks and gestures and fields of performance and opacity.

Drawing from figurative and spiritual Haitian painting traditions as well as from European-American modernism, the artist’s large-scale works offer a provocative and timely position on the status of abstraction today. Published on the occasion of his solo presentation at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, this first monograph dedicated to the artist tracks his work in reference to contemporary image production, art history, and the cultural and historical context of Haiti in particular.
Tomm El-Saieh’s solo museum debut features a suite of new paintings that explore and probe the meanings of abstraction by invoking Haitian traditions of figurative spiritual art.

El-Saieh’s colorful, map-like constellations are created through a frenetic process of all-over rubbing, a diverse application of material, and strategic erasures. The large-scale compositions are so full of information that the works themselves allude to the artist’s labored physical process, which could be seen as performative.

Through this mode of facture, El-Saieh creates a subtly diverse range of surfaces that can be seen as networks, fields of data, or nodes of activity, or that can be interpreted as abrasions or micro-destructions to the paintings’ surfaces.

Curated by Alex Gartenfeld, Artistic Director, and Stephanie Seidel, Associate Curator.
Abstract art is art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality but instead use shapes, colours, forms and gestural marks to achieve its effect.

Abstraction indicates a departure from reality in depiction of imagery in art. This departure from accurate representation can be slight, partial, or complete.

Abstraction, as is understood by modernism is largely missing in the history of Haitian painting and this gap moved El-Saieh to develop a critical approach to the term and its manifestation in his works.

Abstract Expressionism is a term applied to a movement in American painting that flourished in New York City after World War II, sometimes referred to as the New York School or, more narrowly, as action painting.
Yayoi Kusama, Infinity Mirrored Room – The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away, 2013. Wood, metal, glass mirrors, plastic, acrylic panel, rubber, LED lighting system, acrylic balls, and water, 287.7 × 415.3 × 415.3 cm. Courtesy of David Zwirner, N.Y. © Yayoi Kusama
Installation view of Damien Hirst “The Veil Paintings” at Gagosian, Los Angeles. Photo by Emily Berl for Artsy.
As a child, El-Saieh studied painting and trained with local painters in the area, understanding rhythm, color, and pattern as structural forces that have the potential to charge a surface beyond the visual. He observed narratives that ranged, in the works of his teachers, from the religious and the politic to the touristic.

El-Saieh’s practice extends beyond painting and he instigates the spread of Haitian art to wider audiences.
TOMM EL SAIEH  INSTALLATION VIEW

Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami

Free Admission Every Day
Tues–Sun, 11am–7pm
Closed Mondays

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