

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Andrew Witt, "Marisa Merz Thomas Dane Gallery," *Artforum*, October 31, 2016

ARTFORUM

Marisa Merz Thomas Dane Gallery



Marisa Merz, *Untitled*, 2016, mixed media on paper, 98 x 59".

Ecstasy is a state that can push you outside of yourself. The eighty-five-year-old artist Marisa Merz offers up large- and small-scale drawings, paintings, and sculptures, all *Untitled*, of figures seemingly on the edge of such an experience. In one painting from 2016, disembodied hands swirl around a being in a chaotic spiral of energy. Merz uses color to channel its polymorphic magical properties (to paraphrase Michael Taussig), so that she may allude to, or even take us to the brink of, something rapturous. This experience—frenetic, stupor inducing—separates the psyche from the body, forcing one beyond the confines of flesh. And certainly, Merz takes us there, as her use of color is premised on movement and transformation. The artist unravels the solidity of the figures she depicts.

Another work, from 2014, more subdued and drawn on a simple wooden support, presents an innocent, angelic face, its eyes closed off to the world in front of it. It appears transfixed, frozen in deep anguish. This celestial creature, however, is distinctly material—*hard*. It is as though its numinous condition were some kind of curse. One sees this again in a 2014 sculpture of a bodiless, deformed head, made from a stone smothered in wax, unfired clay, and gold paint. Perhaps Merz's otherworldly spirits are indeed fallen souls, calcified and condemned for eternity.