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*Martha Tuttle: Ma/Ma*

January 28 – March 27, 2021

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Ma/Ma*, an exhibition of paintings, sculptures, and drawings by Martha Tuttle—the artist’s first presentation at the gallery.

The title of the exhibition unites the first two letters of two seemingly distinct entities: the Magellanic Clouds (a pair of dwarf galaxies that neighbor our own), and the Madonna. The phonetic construction *Ma/Ma* points to motherhood—and to Tuttle’s interest in the common origin of all matter in the universe.

A series of intimate paintings, each titled *Earth Iron*, *Sky Iron*, hazily evoke the Magellanic Clouds—astronomical forms made semi-opaque by gas and dust. Tuttle dyed the paintings with indigo and scrubbed them with hematite, an iron ore painters have used as pigment for millennia. Clouds of deep blues and reddish blacks swirl above angular stitched seams, and in a few cases, tiny fragments of ferrous meteorite burst through the pigment, relating as much to the iron content of distant nebulae as to the minerals held in our bloodstream.

The ferric thread of this show also weaves into Tuttle’s references to *Madonna and Child*, the Duccio painting from the turn of the 14th century. The gilded background behind the two figures was primed with red bole, an iron-rich pigment that amplifies the glow of gold leaf. But the tenderness between Jesus and Mary is what drew Tuttle to the icon: the infant reaches toward his mother’s face and raises her veil, her index finger hooks under his robe, his foot grazes her wrist. Taking a broader view of the painting, beyond the context of Christianity (images of mothers and children have been made throughout history and across the globe), Tuttle is interested in how we understand, recognize, accept, and perform the act of care.

Touch—like what we see in *Madonna and Child*—is Tuttle’s most valuable tool in the practice of care. She thinks of touch as “an elaborated intimacy,” as a means of collapsing the boundaries between one’s body and the rest of the world. Three sculptures embedded directly in the walls isolate individual moments of compassionate touch in Duccio’s painting. Made of cast glass, carved alabaster, chalcedony, and more meteorite, each sculpture extends the idea of tenderness into the material world—into an act performed by so-called inanimate materials.

Given the right conditions, each particle of cosmic dust hurtling through space has the potential to become a sun, a planet, a moon, a mountain, or eventually, perhaps, an organism. Everything in the universe is made of the same stuff—matter, we call it—and Tuttle’s aim is “to emphasize a sense of connection and belonging to one’s physical world; to conceptualize

and actually feel that a person is just matter in a world of matter.” Rather than perpetuating the myth that humans are anomalous entities of towering intelligence, separate from our surroundings, Tuttle insists we are connected to—perhaps even the *same* as—everything else that *is*.

In 2016, long before this body of work was conceived, Tuttle shared the following impression:

How wonderful that the secrets of our becoming are held in such seemingly humble form. Holding the universe in a grain of sand, we are the universe thinking about itself. Or we are walking, talking minerals. It would be so easy to dismiss these [observations] as sentimentalities rather than to acknowledge how amazing it is that they are not at all poetic exaggerations, just simple statements of fact.

Trees and plants continue to surprise us with their sophisticated methods of communicating with each other. Rocks, too, likely have a means of relating to their own history and existence. Even atomic structures, Tuttle argues, are aware and intelligent—if on their own terms. What if what we call love, care, intimacy, and tenderness were not experiences solely available to our own species, but the ubiquitous conditions of the mattered universe?

Martha Tuttle, born in 1989 in Santa Fe, lives and works in New York. In addition to her current project on view at Storm King Art Center (New York), *A stone that thinks of Enceladus*, Tuttle has mounted solo exhibitions in Belgium, Chicago, Italy, and New York. Her work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and University of San Diego. Her shows have been reviewed in *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Hyperallergic*, *New York Times*, *Time Out*, and *W Magazine*.