

ARTFORUM

Aubrey Levinthal: *Tourist*

By [Daniel Gerwin](#)
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Aubrey Levinthal's first solo show at M+B in 2021 featured paintings depicting the artist sequestered at home and around her neighborhood: life during the pandemic. "*Tourist*," Levinthal's second act here, finds her friends and family out and about in the world, as the exhibition's title implies.

Levinthal works in a neutral range—her color is about nuance and gravitas (it also happens to reflect her native Philadelphia, a gray, postindustrial town). Her paintings are so quiet you can hear a pin drop, which deepens the introspective or melancholic expressions on her subjects' faces. But the artist's palette in this outing is broadened by the inclusion of abstract shapes executed in a single, saturated hue. *Dim Sum Go Go*, 2023, is almost entirely cream colored: Levinthal depicts a woman who faces the viewer while sitting at a restaurant table upon which lie two scarlet rhomboid place mats whose heat and geometry contrast forcefully against the pale environs; the forms rhyme with a horizontal band of the same red below the eatery's ceiling. These strong shapes counter the tremulous delicacy of Levinthal's almost provisional brushwork, wherein a curving wash of paint suffices for a shoe, or even an entire couch. Reflected light is another key player in these pieces—rarely does the artist render shadows or decisively model solid forms. In other works, a luminous countertop, lambent rectangles on a subway platform, and a lustrous lock of hair articulate a sense of location precisely within each picture's general spatial indeterminacy.

Levinthal paints mostly from memory—and occasionally uses reference materials, such as photographs or drawings—but prioritizes composition over realistic proportions and anatomical accuracy. She subordinates visual fealty to internal experience: transparency and opacity, hard and softly slipping edges, and local and subjective color are all orchestrated in accordance with the artist's feeling and instinct, enabling her to make images that brim with empathy and psychological presence, and that record a sensitive gaze as it brushes over the world.

