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HYPERALLERGIC

NEW VIEWS OF THE EVERYDAY WORLD

Emily Pettigrew and Aubrey Levinthal are two painters who have much in common, but their differences run deeper and are more telling.

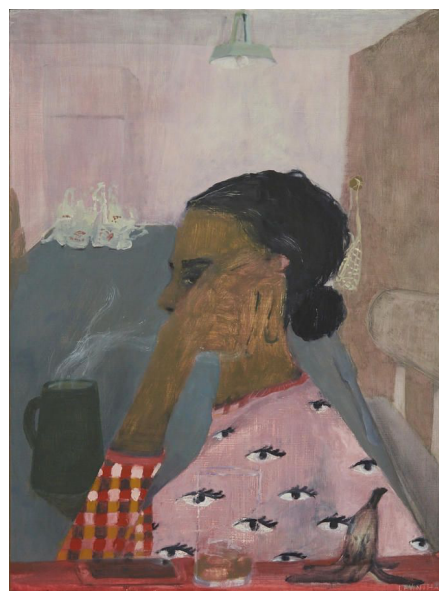
by John Yau
July 3, 2021

Emily Pettigrew and Aubrey Levinthal, whose work I have previously reviewed, have a number of things in common: both of them paint young women alone and use color and atmospheric light to infuse their depictions with a particular emotional weather. Another crucial thing they share is their rejection of overt narrative in favor of interiority and opacity. But, as much as they overlap, the differences between them run deeper and are more telling. Currently, their paintings are paired in the exhibition [Odd Hours: Aubrey Levinthal and Emily Pettigrew](#) at Monya Rowe Gallery (June 24–July 22, 2021).

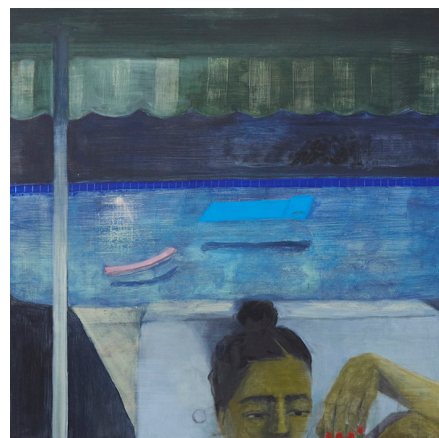
Adjacent to Pettigrew's painting is Levinthal's oil on panel "Groceries" (2021). We see a seated woman with reddish-brown skin in profile. Her hand is flat against the side of her face, obscuring most of it. She is lost in thought, and pressed close to the picture plane, with a long, gray table stretching back behind her. On the table's far end, in line with the woman's forehead, Levinthal has depicted a cluster of white plastic shopping bags. This compression of near and far is given a further twist by the woman's pink shirt, which is decorated with rows of single eyes with black pupils. An ordinary situation of a woman who has put the groceries on a table and sat down becomes extraordinary and mysterious.

Levinthal's attention to details within compressed spaces is what makes her work sing. In "By the Pool" (2021), a woman's face rises above the painting's bottom edge. She is seated in front of an empty pool, a few water toys floating on its placid cerulean blue surface. What jumps out is the woman's hand, with its bright red fingernails pointing down and grazing the bottom edge of the canvas, in this largely blue, moody painting.

Whereas Pettigrew lays down a solid skin of acrylic paint, Levinthal applies layers of thin, semi-transparent washes, which she often scrapes down with a razor, giving her work a worn look — which can be read as a barometer of the subject's feelings and



Aubrey Levinthal, "Groceries" (2021)



Aubrey Levinthal, "By the Pool" (2021)

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thoughts. At the same time, while Levinthal paints herself, her family, and her friends, Pettigrew depicts a number of women whose faces we cannot see, as they are turned away from us, or she hones in on a detail, such as woman's arm and hand.

By employing such devices as paint color and materiality, cropping (which may be inspired by film), and the definition of a three-dimensional space, Pettigrew and Levinthal remind us that the most well-worn pictorial possibilities can still be used to arrive at genuine states of feeling as well as challenge clichés about the depiction of women and people of different races.

I think the strongest bond between these two otherwise very different artists comes from the gap between what we are used to seeing and what Pettigrew and Levinthal depict. In their work, they show us views that ask viewers to stop and contemplate what they are seeing and that they might not have actually seen it before.



Installation view, *Odd Hours*: Aubrey Levinthal & Emily Pettigrew at Monya Rowe Gallery, New York.