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Hilary Pecis at The Pit

By Lee Purvey | May 22, 2019



Hilary Pecis, *Dinner* (2019). Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 36 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and The Pit. Photo: Jeff McLane.

Aiming to transpose traditional still life and landscape genres onto contemporary L.A., Hilary Pecis' *From a Place in the Light* risks boho-chic banality with its paintings of celebrity cemeteries and Rental Girl-worthy living rooms. Yet, Pecis is refreshingly resistant to the conceptual cuteness one might expect from such an effort. Rather, in these genre-blending acrylic canvases, she performs a sort of alchemy, transforming material that seems destined for cliché and heavy-handedness with winking humor and an exuberant approach to color and anecdotal detail.

Tables, Flowers, and Books (2019) mimics itself across the canvas. The interior scene, which depicts two bouquets on a table, is repeated in books and posters that decorate the space. This visual quotation, together with the presence—in this painting and others—of books on prominent figures of 20th century art (e.g. Georgia O'Keeffe, Betty Woodman, David Hockney), functions as a cheeky punchline, practically screaming a capital-A "Art!" from the canvas with a megaphone. But it's Pecis' craft that rises above the humorous and referential qualities of these works.

Echo Park Lake (2018) highlights Pecis' confident use of brush and color. Starting with the cruder, imperfect blobs of the lily pads sprinkling the foreground, the middle of the painting melts into an overgrowth of dots and dashes—the line between original and reflected image lost in a verdant haze—before yielding to the firmer lines of palm trees, houses, and solid blue sky. This painting coaxes detail from the rest of the works: the pointillist strokes of *Kaba on a Chair's* (2019) titular feline, the chaos of distorted light unleashed inside the glassware in *Dinner* (2019).

While Pecis' self-conscious attention to art history and L.A. myth might seem to beg a clearer engagement with social and cultural themes, the strength of her work lies in its stubborn refusal to break character. Thus, a painting of *Echo Park Lake* or a stack of expensive hardcover monographs—material seemingly fraught with both romantic associations of SoCal bohemia and the issues of gentrification and cultural elitism that come with them—serves as an unpretentious showcase of Pecis' singular style. Paradoxically, then, *From a Place in the Light* treats well-trodden locales with striking sensitivity, while flattening—in urban scenes almost entirely absent of human forms—the social landscape in which her paintings reside.