

Brook Hsu



Olivia Van Kuiken



Francesca Facciola



PHOTOGRAPHY BY AVERY NORMAN

Five New York Painters

Every generation of artists kills painting and then brings it back to life. In New York City, an unorganized cluster of female painters born in the mid- to late 90s are currently doing exactly that—each in their own, self-contained practice, and yet collectively showing the creative breadth of the medium in 2023.

Justine Neuberger



Michelle Uckotter

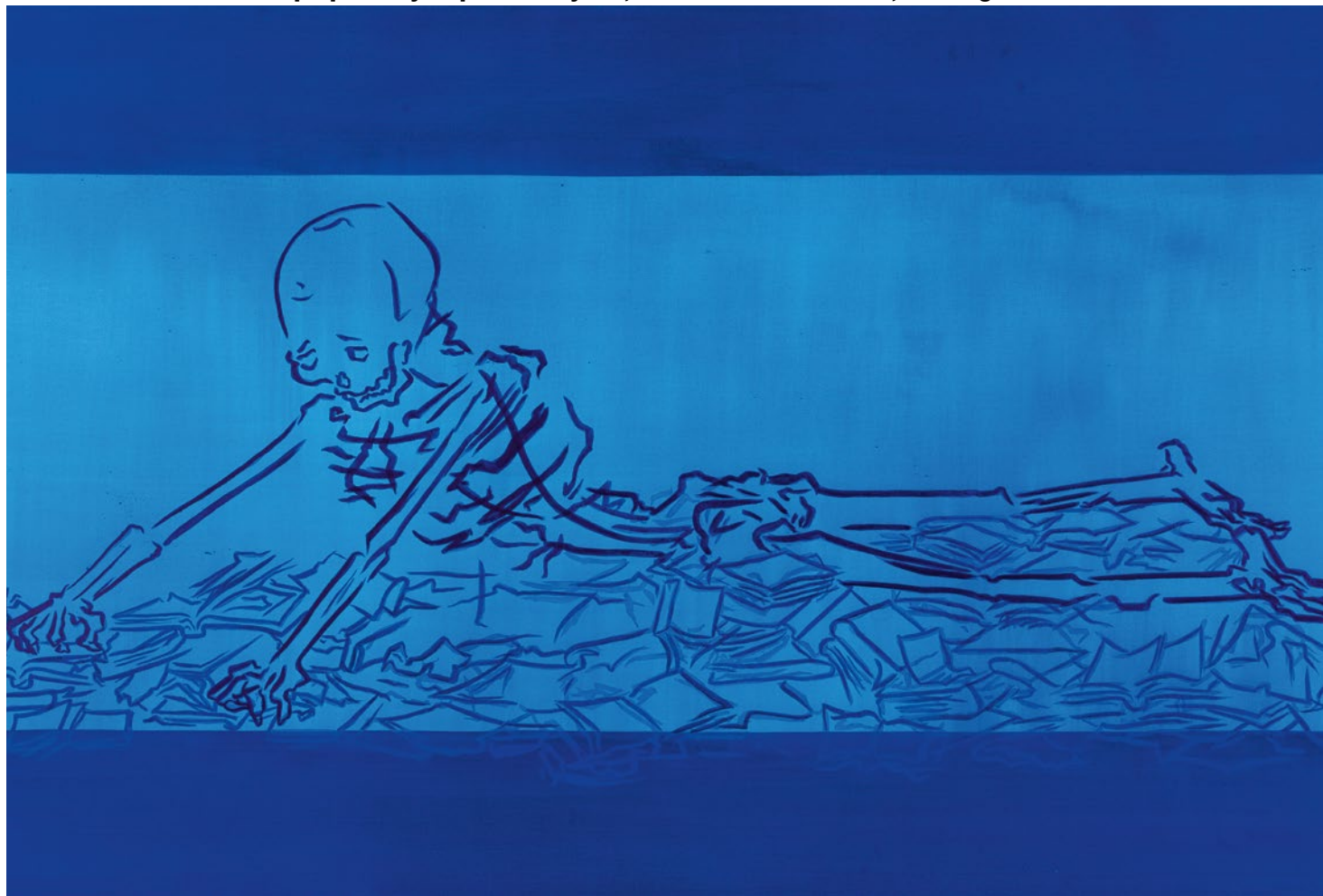


TEXT BY REILLY DAVIDSON

Brook

On any given visit to Brook Hsu's studio, one should find stacks of books ranging from meditations on love to volumes on film. Paintings at various stages man the perimeter, and a hodgepodge of works on paper occupy tabletops. This is her sacred world, its energetic pulse upheld by Hsu's unwavering devotion to her practice. She grew up in Oklahoma and maintains strong ties to the romance of pastoralism, rendering loving subjects in shades of natural and artificial green. Her world reads as virtually impenetrable. Brook is soft spoken, yet unwaveringly direct. Every word she writes and utters is sculpted with prudence.

Hsu's distinct sensitivities emerge from her specific attachment to drawing. Her linework expresses poetic flashes of an inner world marked by the weight of history and her attachment to intimacy. In producing these works on paper, she partially exposes the phantasms "which constitute the incommunicable depth and singularity of the individual soul." The illustrative format, as expressed by Amy Sillman, "feels its way both backwards and forwards in time. Far from being a preparatory or preliminary act, a sketch or a rehearsal, drawing is a



constant respooling of chronological time and circular time, where 'knowing' builds up over time, but also loops back onto itself."

On the level of composition, Hsu is motivated by art historical players. Skeletons frequently appear throughout her compositions, tapping into Pierre Klowsowski's erotic tendencies and his consistent manifestations of the *Danse Macabre*. Romantic landscapes recur in Hsu's practice as well, recalling the idealistic compositions of Nicolas Poussin, whose body of work came out of his attachment to mythology and religion, as well as his ability to "see nature through the glass of time." By dealing with the inheritance of history, Hsu illuminates a particularized network of reference points.

She maintains a lucid relationship with the world, absorbing its energies and reflecting them back out through painting, illustration, writing, and sculpture. Figures and thicketed linework are directed with a rare poignancy, as Hsu underscores romance and pain in the same breath. Her studio space is soaked in pathos, whirring with the artist's particular energies. It's important to return to her eloquence. Brook speaks with directness and care, assured in her position as arbiter of forms and practitioner of desire.



Brook Hsu, *Nishi*, ink on canvas, 2021
Left page: Brook Hsu, *Olympia*, ink on canvas, 2021

Brook Hsu is a Taiwanese-American artist. Recent solo exhibitions by Hsu include Sant'Andrea de Scaphis; Gladstone Gallery, Rome; Kiang Malingue, Hong Kong; and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin.

Image courtesy: the artist
Photography: Stephen Faught

Francesca

Encountering Francesca Facciola's extensive body of work creates the sense that one has fallen into a vortex of imaginal refuse. Ideas and childhood memories get remixed into hypermontages. Staten Island and New Jersey were the molds that formed the artist. The city grit and Fran's circle of friends and family filter themselves into the fabric, as she borrows from reality in order to formulate her surreality.

Facciola's diverse compositions utilize the strange corners of her mindscape as a springboard, the detailed articulation of her forms encouraging a paradoxical read, as Facciola submits to cognizant drift in the act of painting. These scenes are both intensely rendered and conceptually unbridled, creating a moving split between form and content. The hallucinatory dimension of Facciola's painting stems from the commingling of juvenile objects and an exacting method of translating images into paint.

This painterly universe extends from the Freudian pleasure principle: the id's dominance in childhood and developments of the ego and superego through time. She toggles these three forces, largely suc-



cumbing to unconscious modes of composing. Negotiating her existence and understanding of the world through painting has produced a fixation with these sorts of mind matters. She pays attention to the demands of her ego, specifically engaging in pleasure-seeking behaviors such as puppetry and popsicle stick crafts in the preparatory stages of her process. *Evil Microwave (A New Era in Cooking)*, for one, was initiated with the production of glycerin soap blocks molded into the shape of Fran's face. She even fabricated a red latex horse suit prior to composing *The painting pillow*, for the show "One Trick Pony." Fran ultimately reverts to childlike tendencies with technical mastery, following backroads to earlier stages of cognitive development.

Facciola often stages and documents her scenes before engaging in the application of paint. She adorns friends and strangers with her homemade props and costumes. Her content runs wild. Fran takes on the seven deadly sins, work/play dichotomies, the evolution of pleasure, and the dissolving boundaries between dreams and memory. Facciola's compositional world is borne out of her nonhierarchical database of images and sensitivity to primal impulses.



Francesca Facciola, *Me, My Self, and Id*, oil on canvas, 2022
Left page: Francesca Facciola, *Lil Lad II*, oil on canvas, 2022

Born in 1994, Francesca Facciola is an American, New York-based artist. Often trippy and psych-informed, her work is currently on view at AMANITA, New York, until July 2nd.

Image courtesy: the artist; Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin; Carl Kostyál, Stockholm, London, Milan.

Justine

Justine Neuberger's paintings embody fantasy and the examination of rituals from a contemporary perspective. One can see the influence of Dutch artworks in her compositions, with faces recalling the portraiture of Jan van Eyck and the grand, auratic seascapes of Ludolf Bakhuizen, whose storms often become pure energetic fields. Following suit, Neuberger's paintings are characterized by their swirling dispositions. Her intuitive gestures are propelled by an understanding of space and the emotional consequences of color.

Despite the chaos of adolescence in New York, Neuberger's home-life was traditional. Elements of her Jewish background make their way into the fold. She continues to reference Hebrew folk songs and implement Judaic iconography. High school was the place where she came into her own. She sought out fine art courses, particularly excelling in oil painting.

Neuberger's compositions ebb and flow between distinct representations and ambient fields of color and objects. The panoply of fairytale subjects exists within the dream realm, a space that John Ashbery describes as "deep, shallow, open, bent, a point which has no physical dimensions of a universal depth." Neuberger's phantasmic minefields are populated with her symbolic forms and intentional ornamentation. These nebulous objects and figures contribute to the collage-like approach in Neuberger's paintings.

Night We Broke Into Sugar Hill. Jesters carouse around in variegated puffs of smoke. An ominous building encroaches at the painting's edge.



In the Beginning. This painting highlights Neuberger's ability to deal with space. It strikes a somber chord as a figure sits at a cliff's edge, flanked by a wolf-like creature. Beyond the scene, an abyss recalls the skies of Thomas Cole's *The Voyage of Life*, sans any break in the clouds.

Green World in Spring. Haunted trees cave inward, miming a Pousinian landscape that whirls around topless women and more enchanted jesters. One shadow figure holds on for dear life as a beast loses its mind: a mini Spanish bull fight.

Our Path - Darkenu. An aureorean swarm is peppered with faces that run the gamut from James Ensor's masks to softened Holbein portraits.

Banquet. At the painting's center, an unnerving roundtable is in session, with a half made-up clown at the head. They're all raising a toast to God knows what...

Each scene is self-contained, yet part of some peculiar abbey that Neuberger continues to operate within. Memory and time are operative factors within her practice, as she endeavors to trace personal and universal experience. She refers to Deleuze's writing on the unshakable past: "Memory is not in us; it is we who move in a Being-memory, a world-memory. In short, the past appears as the most general form of an already-there, a pre-existence in general, which our recollections presuppose, even our first recollection if there was one, and which our perceptions, even the first, make use of." Neuberger's compositions result from the accumulation of paint layers and her election to maintain vestiges of raw canvas. Her attention to these formal measures is an effort to inscribe within the work traces of the process as it unfolds in time.



Justine Neuberger, *Alice Does-n't*, oil on canvas, 2021
Left page: Justine Neuberger, *Dana I*, oil on canvas, 2022

Justine Neuberger (b. 1993) is an American painter based and raised in New York by a traditional Jewish Family. Her oil paintings are infused with narratives of kinship and intimacy within a complex contact zone.

Image courtesy: the artist; CLIMA, Milan; and 15 Orient, New York.

Reilly Davidson is a writer, curator, and interdisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn.

Olivia

Olivia van Kuiken (friends refer to her as “Liv”) meddles with unstable visual representations and the failures of language, oscillating between the points at which they come together and those at which they fall apart. She cultivates her visual fields with specific regard for literary and conceptual reference points. The doubled figure is repeated across canvases, as van Kuiken breaks down the boundaries between contradictory emotional states and frameworks.

Hundreds of films coursed through Liv’s adolescence, as she was transfixed by still and moving images. A practice comprising black-and-white photography eventually gave way to paint on canvas as she cruised through undergrad at Cooper Union. Her first solo show in New York opened in spring of 2022 at King’s Leap. She was onto something. The paintings on view contained disembodied heads floating in oases of paint (two of which directly emerged from de Sade’s *Justine* and *Juliette*), as well as clear demonstrations of the artist’s pronounced ability to handle paint.

She continues to honor de Sade’s licentious output, which goes beyond mere perversions and out toward the edges of perception. His



linguistic freedom, alongside that of Unica Zürn, has been the energetic tugboat Liv remains moored to. Both writers celebrate extremes, as they manifest in spaces that exist between and beyond pain and pleasure, where clarified experiences dissolve into the abyss of the unknowable. Liv’s curiosities also draw from psychological investigations of the 20th century, particularly those of Rhoda Kellogg and Fernand Deligny, as they relate to the developments and shortcomings of language. By observing these studies as energetic touchstones, Liv broadens the scope of understanding through images. The precarity of her representations liquify hardened borders, liberating the process of painting so that the artist may work outside of formal constraints.

Liv’s studio functions like a treehouse—a space set away from the rest of the world, consigned to fantasy, creation, and research. Out front, a loud-mouthed dog mans the fenced-in parking lot. After traversing through a small auto repair and climbing up a set of stairs, you enter Liv’s zone. This is where it goes down. Books on Soutine, Ensor, and the like populate the entryway; a couch sits just beyond. In the daytime, light floods the room, charging the already vibrant works-in-progress with illumination. Drawings line the walls, alluding to a future composed in paint. This is the place where the abstract and referential are in constant friction, where Liv unloads a bevy of obsessive impulses.



Olivia Van Kuiken, *Mac Janus*, oil on canvas, 2022
Left page: Olivia Van Kuiken, *She clock me clock we clock*, oil on canvas, 2022

Michelle

Michelle Uckotter's claustrophobic world merges with the curious, each figure seemingly trapped within a strange interior. Her spaces are wracked with objects on the brink of collapse. While Uckotter's work is consistently adorned with these austere punctuations, her practice is refreshingly uncynical. These scenes are illustrative and painterly at once, frustrating the boundaries of identification. One can see the sinuosity of Degas's impressionistic linework updated with half-clothed figures in somber zones.

Michelle—otherwise known as “Shelley”—came to New York by way of Baltimore, the city that cultivated the likes of Edgar Allen Poe, Babe Ruth, and John Waters. “The Charm City,” with its dilapidated scenes alongside well-manicured greenery, is wrought with the sort of frictions that Shelley deals with in her practice. She arbitrates the strange and uncomfortable with fantastic ease. Shelley opted out of the scene there, trading it in for New York. This city has been home to the artist for only a few years, although, from an outside perspective, the passage ap-



pears seamless. Shelley's part of the tightly wound network of artists that show at King's Leap and she remains in dialogue with her gallery counterparts.

In terms of her practice, Uckotter's particularities and her penchant for strange women echo the sensibilities of artists like Ellen Berkenblit, whose treasure chest of forms includes nondescript girls, crazed animals, and enigmatic shapes. Berkenblit leans on the expressionistic, while Uckotter invokes the psychosexual morbidity of Hans Bellmer's dolls. Bellmer's universe, as illuminated by Hal Foster, revolves around the “erotic manipulation of the dolls [as] he explores a sadistic impulse that is also self-destructive. In this way the dolls may go inside sadistic mastery to the point where the subject confronts its greatest fear: its own fragmentation and disintegration.” Shelley explores this model, decorating it with a horror-camp flair. The aesthetic integrity of Uckotter's compositions is crucial to this end, as her penchant for stylistic maintenance aligns with camp.

Shelley's pastel cosmos deals with alienation and fear. Her figures are without discernible facial features, a move on the artist's part to prop-ify her subjects. It is as though these forms become dolls in wicked, haunted dollhouses. Uckotter is the puppeteer, romancing the gap between seduction and repulsion.



Michelle Uckotter, *Flirty Girl with One Arm*, oil pastel on panel, 2022.
Left page: Michelle Uckotter, *Ascending the Staircase*, oil pastel on panel, 2021.