
undercurrent

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MEGHAN COX /*hours and hours*

04.23 - 05.30 /2021

Gallery Hours: Thur /Fri /Sat /Sun, 1-7 pm

Undercurrent is pleased to present Meghan Cox's first New York solo exhibition, *Hours and Hours*, comprised of twenty-three small, elegant oil paintings. The work was created during 2020 to early 2021, in Cox's meticulous representational style. As the exhibition title suggests, the work is about time and space; in this case perhaps about the complex investment of time in the process of creating a pictorial illusion.

Each painting is a physical documentation representing the days or sometimes months of work to achieve closure for its specific visual idea. The paintings are a complex result of multiple reworked or wiped and disappeared "unconscious" layers of paint, which represent the artist's desire to achieve a balance of image, form, line, detail, and color. Cox almost exclusively paints from life – what is in front of her – without the intervention of digital media. In a sense, the artist transfers the intimacy of the "artist's gaze" to the viewer. When much of representational painting being made today relies on the convenient use of mechanical/digital reproductions to apprehend detail and inspiration, Cox's practice can be seen as eerily reminiscent of the nineteenth-century movements of the Barbizon school, Impressionists, and plein air painting, which were responses to current academic and commercial aesthetics, and paradoxically forged the way for movements that morphed into abstraction.

Hours and Hours consists of two groups of paintings: a main-group and a smaller introductory-group. The smaller group consists of eight square oil paintings on wood panels. Roughly 8 to 12 inches in size; these relate more to the artist's previous works, especially the two figurative panels. Meghan Cox's representation of people can be seen as dreamy and immobile; dormant to time, entrapped by a moment of Déjà vu, a moment already seen and an other worldly experience. A typical example is *that day i went to wawa*, which is seen from above with a tote bag placed on the figure's chest. In *that day i went to school*, the subject points a laser at an educational poster depicting different varieties of trees. This painting is reminiscent of Dutch genre paintings in the use of light, color, and composition, but also in how they mixed "serious moral" content with slight irony. The question arises: is the figure a student, a teacher, or just a wanderer playing with the gadget? A viewer becomes engaged in creating their own narrative. The rest of the introductory-group is composed of still-lives and acts as a prelude for the main-group of complementary paintings. In the center of these still-lives is the depiction of a white porcelain cup with mushrooms or almonds nestled within a busy pattern engrossing the picture plane. This pensive moment, a white vessel, denies the noise and retains our attention, becoming a symbol of stability, a simple comfort, sustenance.

The main-group has fifteen vertical oil paintings on paper mounted on plywood, 14 by 12 inches in size. They have an unusual and important compositional element uniting them all: a 9-inch still-life square located on the white ground in the upper part of the panel. According to the artist, the inspiration for this compositional format came from large art books and how painting reproductions are represented on the page. This compositional element creates a trompe l'oeil effect: the still life can be interpreted not as the painting, but as the depiction of the reproduction of the painting. These reproductions have optical illusions contained within the optical illusion. Arabesque patterns create a dizzying mirage as in some string theorist's imagination. Skillful play between flatness, illusion, an illusion of an illusion, and an illusion of flatness can be compared with math formulas; science and fabrication; presence and absence. These panels of still-lives are composed in a classical triangle-pyramid style from various patterned paper cutouts on a dark background, this could be interpreted as an exercise in the formalist tradition, which makes each work abstract, and formal as a whole. The compositions feel precarious, as real and imaginary shadows are interspersed throughout the space. Among these there are three paintings, each of them representing a section of a window. Through each window, a different time of day is seen: one in the day, another at night, and one at twilight. The window images allude to the cyclical nature of time and the ephemeral qualities of light and dark.

Cox's mastery of embracing the full spectrum of her medium amplifies our temporal experience. Her ability to portray a laser sharp moment next to the blurriness experienced after a long slumber defies time. She collapses tonal colors with her brilliant spectrum of fully saturated hues into one image, titillating time and space, turning seconds to minutes, minutes to hours, and hours to days. Reaching beyond the works Meghan chose to paint a portion of the gallery walls with color. This shift extends the small paintings into electric color fields, radiating her pensive focus beyond the picture plane of their surfaces into the skin of our daily lives. Hours and Hours is a contemplation on reality. Meghan Cox's work becomes one of ritual, repetition, and transcendence, strung together like a meditation bracelet of beads.

Altogether, the titles flow in a rhythmic pattern, similar to that of a poem, or chant...

that day and yellow

that late afternoon and lilac

that early evening and orange

that morning and grape

that day i saw flowers at night

that morning and purple

that day i saw winter citrus

that morning and peach

that day and other painters

that day and mint

that morning and peach and mauve

that late day and bluegreenyellow

that day i saw an orange grave

that early evening and blue

that day and fruit

that day i ate marcona almonds with rosemary

that day i ate blistered peanuts

that day i ate a crimini? or pecans? or an orange?

that day i ate salad

that day i ate a crimini

that day i went to wawa

that day i went to school

that day i ate popcorn

Julius Ludavicius

/Co-Director



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