

NOT YOUR REGULAR PAINTING

Jenifer J. Lee, Talia Levitt, JJ Manford, Erick Medel, John Rivas, Mia Weiner

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F2T Gallery is pleased to present “Not your regular painting,” a group exhibition that explores and challenges the boundaries of traditional painting through the works of five artists: Jennifer J. Lee, Talia Levitt, JJ Manford, Erick Medel, John Rivas, and Mia Weiner.

In a deliberately provocative manner, the exhibition title refers to the surprising originality of the invited artists’ painting practices. Each artist uses unconventional mediums and techniques that question traditional expectations, positioning themselves in a limbo between painting and textile object, thus creating a collective dialogue that redefines the relationship between medium, surface, and visual narrative.

Artists like Mia Weiner and Erick Medel use a truly textile technique—loom weaving for the former and embroidered thread on denim with a sewing machine for the latter—but applied to a figurative language that aims to replace the classic painting on canvas or, in Mia’s case, the more realistic language of photography. Conversely, artists like Jennifer Lee, JJ Manford, and Talia Levitt use mixed painting techniques (oil, oil stick, and oil pastels) applied while playing with the knottiness of the texture of the canvas—often a raw jute canvas. The result is equally hybrid: a *trompe l’oeil* that pretends to be textile art, where the sensory roughness of the image transcends the surface of the painting, but is actually the result of meticulous painting technique. For example, Talia Levitt’s work “Time Wise,” which at first glance appears to be a cross-stitched embroidered image, is actually acrylic paint carefully applied within a grid engraved by the artist on the canvas.

In both approaches—textile or pictorial—the result is an unconventional work that transforms the painted surface into a sensory as well as visual experience, stimulating both touch and imagination, creating an immersive experience.

JENNIFER J. LEE

Jennifer J. Lee deeply and provocatively explores the intersection between the physicality and digitization of images. The artist paints representations of found photographs, often sourced from internet forums and online sites, on thick jute that perversely simulates the mechanical process of photography while degrading it. Her work is strikingly photorealistic, utilizing the knottiness of the canvas to create a pixelated effect. At a technological crossroads, where recent advances in digitization have made images more vulnerable than ever, it is as if the artist is painting not the image itself, but rather the mortar between the pixels, creating pictorial screens suspended on raw jute surfaces.

This delicate yet powerful technique distinguishes Lee's work, which, through her art, invites us to reflect on the ephemeral nature of digital images. This paradoxical process challenges the integrity of images by reintroducing a sense of physicality to them.

TALIA LEVITT

Illusion, perspective, and tactile sensations are fundamental elements in her work. Although the aesthetics recall the long tradition of textile art and embroidered patterns, Talia's subjects are contemporary and reflect her daily life. In this exhibition, the depiction of a pregnant woman on the canvas takes on a particular meaning, as the artist herself is soon to become a mother, a self-representation that thus infuses an intimate connection between her personal life and the work.

Talia's works require a significant commitment from their viewers: an appreciation of details, patience, and, above all, time. Aware of this, the artist rewards this patience with the richness of her compositions, which slowly reveal their stories and figures, almost frozen out of time and space. The background of Levitt's paintings is a riot of colorful fabric samples combined with a trompe l'oeil effect: Levitt uses ziplock bags to squeeze acrylic paint applied in dots of varying lengths, producing a faux embroidery effect. Levitt's love for visual deception continues to surprise with hidden details that emerge only on a second or third glance.

JJ MANFORD

Manford draws from photographs and interior design catalogs to create architectural structures for his paintings, resulting in compositions that do not aim to convey any specific environment but function as fantasies that satisfy his desire to possess the depicted objects. Manford often includes art historical references in his imaginary dwellings, incorporating iconic design objects and celebrating the synergy between art, design, and architecture, as seen in the work on display "Castelli Office with Oversized Gaetano Pesce Lamp, Frank Stella, & Garfield Cookie Jar." These spaces, devoid of human inhabitants, offer the viewer a moment of quiet to contemplate the behaviors of hypothetical residents and project themselves into these dreamlike environments. Or, they simply leave the celebrated design elements as the only protagonists, creatively brought together in his compositions.

A distinctive feature of Manford's work is the prominent texture of materials such as canvas and linen, which adds depth and dimension to his compositions. Using oil sticks and pastels, Manford creates surfaces rich in vibrant and bright colors. His careful use of saturation, temperature, and tone of pigments gives his paintings a playful and lively atmosphere, resulting in a dynamic visual experience imbued with a refined graphic aura.

ERICK MEDEL

Using a sewing machine and colored threads, Medel creates works that celebrate the everyday life of his community, capturing the energy and vibrancy of the Boyle Heights neighborhood, located just outside his studio in Los Angeles.

Medel began working with textiles during his MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design, turning his interest into a passion for soft sculpture and, eventually, into his distinctive “thread paintings” on dark denim. This sturdy material provides a backdrop that highlights the brightly colored threads, with stitches acting like brushstrokes. The rapid stitches emanate energy and movement, while the softer stitches follow the contours of his scenes, making his sewing machine a drawing tool. His intuitive and spontaneous approach guides the fabric as the machine punctures and embroideries the images, reminiscent of the work surrounding him. The colors of the hand-painted murals that cover local shops influence his palette, making each work an exploration of what it means to navigate one’s identity between two worlds, America and Mexico.

JOHN RIVAS

Using a wide range of materials, including paint, felt, fabric, wood, corn, and beans, John Rivas draws from his Salvadoran heritage and creates compositions rich in symbolism and narrative. His works, inspired by family photo albums and traditions, explore themes of heritage and the preservation of family stories. Rivas integrates objects from his childhood into his works, transforming paintings into sculptures that combine unexpected elements. The expressive brushstrokes and charcoal rubbings add a tactile dimension to his visual collages. Each piece pays homage to family and community through the lens of his roots.

MIA WEINER

Mia Weiner’s practice is focused on the topic of human bodies and how bodies come together in unity and oneness. In Weiner’s works, bodies meet, cross, and tangle in domestic spaces, outdoors, and float within the realm of daydream or abstraction. Interestingly, you can’t see the figures’ faces, so the work becomes less narrative and the viewer’s relationship to the body shifts. The artist says: *“I am not worried about who these people are and why, but instead, when I look at the image, I feel that my body becomes their bodies and I have a more visceral/somatic and emotional response. Regarding the specific color palette for these two pieces included in the show - I have been thinking a lot about the color of the body when it’s warm, flushed, lips, scars, more intimate bits, and the softness of these warm colors that blanket you.”*

Mia’s work also has a clear reference to photography: the artist creates choreographies of bodies in her studio, which she then photographs. Starting from these digital images, the image is then “translated” onto the canvas using different structures of framing. The artist plays between digital and tactile, between image and real object.