

The New York Times

Elena Sisto, 'Afternoons'

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week Art in review, from Times critics.

By Martha Schwendener



Ankle (2013-15), an oil on linen by Elena Sisto, at Lori Bookstein, offers layers of pattern and color

The artist's studio, the subject of painting for centuries, is deserving of its own genre, like still life or portraiture. Elena Sisto's "Afternoons," at Lori Bookstein, offers a contemporary take on the subject, in which funny, frowzy and poignant fragments of studio life make brief but emphatic appearances.

Some of the best works here focus on unexpected or unlikely details. "Ankle" (2013-15) is a close-up of a humble black clog, animal-print sock, long johns and jeans that together create layers of pattern, color and effect. In "Blending Brush" (2013-15), three paintbrushes appear before the artist's chest, reflected in a mirror, as if she were a magician or a sorcerer brandishing her tools. It is a reminder that painting involves similar sleights of hand.

In an essay accompanying the show, Robert Storr, the outgoing dean of Yale's School of Art and a former curator at the Museum of Modern Art — and whose writing on behalf of Ms. Sisto's work is noteworthy — compares her paintings to the short stories of Anton Chekhov and Alice Munro. Like those authors, he has written, Ms. Sisto celebrates "lowly, mundane" and domestic things. She uses the mythic studio as a foil and employs the banal, flat coloring and cultivated "bad" drawing of artists like Philip Guston, Alex Katz and Alice Neel to sketch out daily life in a space where women were historically denied access.

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