

JIM SHAW



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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

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.