

Two Coats of Paint

Lucas Blalock and Julia Rommel's well-oiled machine

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By Jacob Patrick Brooks



"Lucas Blalock & Julia Rommel: Hunks", 2026, at Bureau (112 Duane Street), installation view

Consider the hunk as a deliberate, usable form, as Julia Rommel does. Her paintings are hunks of color painted on linen – cut up, unstretched, and stapled into off-the-air color TV bars. They are as much about labor as color. Each painting feels as though it was sledgehammered into the wall just before you walked in the room, still ringing from the strike. Flanking Rommel through the show is Lucas Blalock, photographer. His photos operate similarly, offering an easy, even fun, seduction that segues into discovery as you find out how he's tricked you. Images are cut and layered over one another, details are hidden. The viewer is rewarded for close, patient attention, as in an *I Spy* book.

A Blalock photo, *Cheesehead*, is the first piece on the right when you walk in. Presented essentially as a portrait of a triangle of cheese, it's iconic enough to have been plucked from a *Tom & Jerry* cartoon. The color of the cheese is saturated, comprising zones of dark, light, and medium yellow. It looks to have been deep-fried, cut out, and pasted onto a patterned, glittering fabric. The surface the cheese sits on reflects a yellow ghost. Overall, the piece lands somewhere between a Big Mac ad and an overzealous Depop seller. It's visually confusing, but seductively so.



Lucas Blalock, *Cheesehead*, 2025, archival inkjet print,
72 × 84 inches (182.88 × 213.36 cm), Edition of 1 plus I AP

Next to *Cheesehead* is Rommel's painting *Disciple*. The piece is piss-yellow on the border of three sides, vertically oriented outside the first inch or so at the top and bottom. Peach on the left and right encloses strips of grey and a rectangle of orange. The surface is gorgeous and buttery, the collaged linen cut as carefully as it is arranged. A strip of light gray on the middle left buckles between visible staples, echoed by painted ruptures in the peach on the right, one as though lifting skin to show us the white underneath. Going forward, everything in the show feels premeditated. I don't even trust the orange splatter on the dark grey on the right of the painting.



Julia Rommel, *Disciple*, 2025, oil on linen, 84 × 73 inches (213.36 × 185.42 cm)

After *Disciple* comes *Hammer* – a Blalock photo of a sickle mounted over metal mesh – then a red and magenta Rommel painting, then an enormous Blalock print of shoes, laid out on a metal tray with a trail of toothpicks going up the back wall like ants. Musical notes hover above the shoes. Downstairs, opposite a subtle blue black Rommel is a yonic Blalock. You get the idea. The effect of so many well executed images together is like the dual panic and excitement of taking too many oxycontin.



Lucas Blalock, *Hammer*, 2025, archival inkjet print
19 × 22 ½ inches (48.26 × 57.15 cm), Edition of 4 plus I AP

There is enormous satisfaction in seeing a well-oiled machine do its work. This is heightened by the paranoiac suspicion that it does best is obfuscate its limits. The anxieties implied by the work of Rommel and Blalock are those that revolve around questions of satisfying and challenging the viewer and artist. Over a long enough timeline, the question shifts into *how does one outrun their boredom?*

On the back left corner of the ground floor, Rommel's *Musical Guest* and *Wine and Cheese* loom. Both are yellow and made of canvases secured together. In *Musical Guest*, peaks of earlier layers are visible through loose, gestural swirls of orangey yellow. The border alternates between blue and orange on the right and left. As with *Disciple*, it's not clear how much control is being surrendered. I'm okay with being punked, but it keeps me from going along for the ride. *Wine and Cheese* is comparably loose but feels more like a clear breakthrough. The top two-thirds consists of a pale yellow block, the bottom section a purple slab slathered with a hot butter. It looks like a rage-quit. A painting clearly labored over in the way that those earliest Rommels were. It's exciting where it feels like anything could happen. Riddled with indecision, this is the hunk in revolt.