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Art Gallery Shows to See in February

Tribeca: Julia Rommel/Lucas Blalock

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By Will Heinrich



From left, Julia Rommel, "Wine and Cheese, 2025," oil on linen; Lucas Blalock, "F/D/u/a/n/n/e/c/r/I/a/n/l/g Shoes," 2025, archival inkjet print; Julia Rommel, "Agency," 2025, oil on linen. via Bureau, New York

Julia Rommel makes abstract paintings that feature flat blocks of color, occasional rows of staples and raised lines created when she remounts a canvas on a larger stretcher, moving what had been a corner to the painting's front surface. Here and there she admits a cloud of expressive brushstrokes, but typically only within carefully delineated areas.

In their focus on the physical means and apparatus of their genre, in the faint quotation marks that hover around those expressive gestures and in their overall air of elegant, willful opacity, her paintings distinctly evoke photography — or at least they do when, as in this show, they're hung alongside photographs by Lucas Blalock. One of the paintings, "Studs," even made me think of the black of a Diane Arbus gelatin silver print.

Blalock, though, uses real objects — sometimes with the help of elaborate still lifes and sometimes simply with Photoshop — to make fascinating, gaudy, weirdly evocative images that refer to nothing but themselves. Working from a place of post-digital disillusionment, he understands the elastic mendacity of visual imagery, and he may keep you on your toes by titling a simple photograph of a sickle, say, "Hammer."

Generally, though, how he makes the images, or what he thinks about them, doesn't seem to be the point. In "Corncob," he sticks a sandal with shoelaces into a heavy glass with a grid pattern, and what catches and absorbs your attention isn't what it is, but how it appears. In that way, his photos look very much like painting — or at least, they do when they're hung alongside paintings by Julia Rommel.