

CULTURED

Our Critics' Guide to Unmissable Downtown Exhibitions in Chinatown, the East Village, and Tribeca

Lucas Blalock & Julia Rommel

Bureau | 112 Duane Street

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By John Vincler

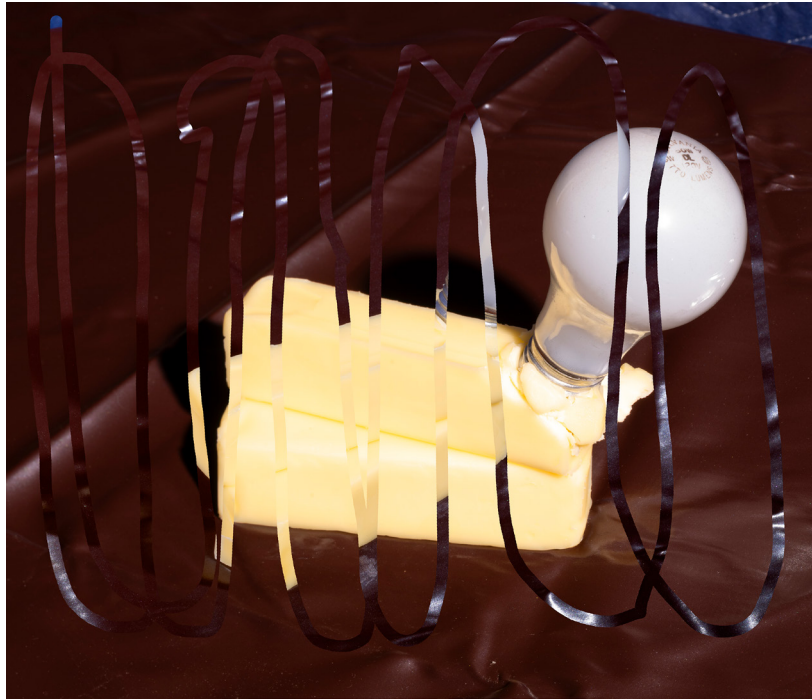


Installation view of “Hunks” featuring Lucas Blalock & Julia Rommel. Image courtesy of the artists and Bureau.

Nothing, at a glance, suggests that these two New York artists—Julia Rommel, a painter, and Lucas Blalock, a photographer—are a fitting match. But the pairing makes for an intriguing, even brilliant, combination, with the artists’ works creating distinct but complementary melodic lines as they intermix across the two floors of Bureau’s gallery.

Rommel makes post-minimalist, post-geometric abstractionist paintings that remain personal, rejecting any ideal of formal austerity. The Brooklyn-based artist folds her canvases—stretching, unstretching, and restretching them as she paints—which usually results in monochrome passages of rectangles, sometimes triangles, in various configurations, with raised seams (from the folding). If she likes of Ellsworth Kelly or Carmen Herrera deemphasized the presence of the hand with their hard-edged approach, Rommel’s methods produce edges that hint at the alchemy of her process. The margins become central. You can—and should—spend as much time looking at her paintings in profile, as you do straight on; up close, as much as you look from far away. I’ve been a fan of Julia Rommel’s paintings since her solo show “Uncle” at Bureau’s previous location in 2022, and her paintings still feel new in a medium where that alone is a feat.

Rommel's passages of color had me comparing them to drones or washes of sound in ambient music; her prominent and numerous staples, fixing linen to her wooden supports (with the occasional staple found on the surface of her pictures also), provide a rhythmic element skittering at the edges of her compositions. In this exhibition, Rommel further expands her vocabulary by embracing brushstrokes and polychromal passages of wet-on-wet gesture, as in the stacked horizontal yellow blocks of *Musical Guest*, 2025, with greens and reds swirling into sunshine tones. In *Discipline*, 2025, Rommel has stapled a seatbelt-width strip of gray painted linen to create two horizontal bands across the large painting's surface—an indication that here she's pushing past folding, moving closer to collage.



Lucas Blalock, *Fat Lamp*, 2025. Image courtesy of the artist and Bureau.

The warm analog resonance of Rommel's paintings contrasts with the lush digital detail in Lucas Blalock's often disorienting photographs, which similarly demand that you shift your perspective and proximity to their surfaces to try and make sense of them. Take the unpronounceably titled *F/D/u/a/n/n/e/c/r/I/a/n/l/g Shoes*, 2025, which ostensibly depicts a pair of men's black leather dress shoes on a metal tray. Blalock's compelling strangeness derives from a mix of studio and digital effects. The tray is bordered by toothpicks set down on the table end to end, outlining the tray's rectangular shape at the front and sides and then continuing up the wall behind and to the right. A set of musical notes are digitally superimposed (like emojis on a social-media photo post) above the oxfords. The shoe at left is oddly deconstructed, with its tan leather sole facing out, and looking nonsensically like the skin of an orange peeled away in a spiral. This surreal intervention is a trick of digital editing.

Blalock's methods are made more transparent in *Fat Lamp*, 2025, an image of a translucent glowing plastic (maybe?) form, illuminated from within, with a not-illuminated lightbulb emerging from it. The surface of the image is marked by a flowing gesture, moving up-and-down in waves across the image's surface, seemingly using a Photoshop scrub preset to both reference painting and expose digital trickery that's usually used to hide imperfections. If *Fat Lamp* leans into the digital, *Hammer*, 2025, comically relies entirely on the linguistic and symbolic—it depicts simply a hand-held sickle casting an arc of a shadow on a white background. Its match, the titular hammer, is missing. This is Zohran's New York after all—it LOLs in this particular context, a stone's throw from the Financial District.

Both artists play with the processes of doing, undoing, and redoing. Their works are evidence of labor performed for labor's sake, following a mix of duty, intuition, and a dash of playful absurdity. They finish one, and then they make another.