

Press Release

Nicole Eisenman. Fallen Angels

Hauser & Wirth Hong Kong
24 March – 30 May 2026

Artist Talk: Tuesday 24 March 5 – 6 PM
Opening Reception: Tuesday 24 March 6 – 8 PM



Nicole Eisenman's 'Fallen Angels,' as the title suggests, is the artist's most down-to-earth show in years. Comprising eleven recent paintings and three sculptures, the exhibition narrows the field of vision to three sites of middle-class living: home, work, beach. Nearly all of the paintings are easel-sized, while two of the sculptures (made with a table and a chair, respectively, from Eisenman's studio) feel like accidental readymades, even ex situ. The contraction of scale and contemplative tone stands in contrast to Eisenman's reputation for crowded tableaux and picaresque social scenes, but the work is no less demanding. Here, figures linger, hesitate, repeat themselves; time settles into familiar spaces. The ambition lies not in spectacle but in attention, in the difficulty of staying with what is close at hand. The first two sites—home and work—have collapsed into each other. The third offers no escape.

One of these works is not like the others. 'Fallen Angels' (2025), the painting that gives the show its title, looks like an alternate movie poster for Wong Kar-wai's 1995 neo-noir. At first, it seems out of place amid the quiet representations of home and work life, but once you remember that Kar-wai shot the film entirely at night, you realize it's key to the meaning of the whole exhibition. Look through the window or up at the sky in nearly any of these paintings, and you'll see it immediately. For Eisenman, the world outside is dark and getting darker.

In 'A Good Place to Start' (2025), the sky glimpsed through a red-curtained window looks practically violent, while the coffee in the cup below it recalls Homer's 'wine-dark sea.' The atemporal effect lends an epic strangeness to an otherwise restrained composition. A similar sea-sky appears in 'Leonard Street' (2025), though the scene is otherwise grounded in noirish urban tropes. A man looms above the neighborhood, lighting a cigarette with a match. Black cats skulk at his ankles. The sidewalk appears slick, iridescent, almost dangerously so: It's possible to love oil paint too much.

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There are also glimpses of pain. In 'Self-Portrait With Deadline' (2025), the artist sits at a small table with a vase of thistles, attempting a still life. Behind her, the wall in shadow takes on the purplish-blue hue of the bloom. But the paper is turning faintly red, a clue that something has gone wrong. Is it carmine or blood on the artist's knuckles?

The difficulty of expressing ideas is one of Eisenman's favorite motifs, which is ironic because she makes it look easy. Dozens of failed paintings lurk beneath the thick impasto surface of 'Processing' (2025), a painting whose title is obviously a double entendre. In the finally finished picture, two simple figures—they look a little like finger puppets—converse on a pale bright ground. Private speech, signified by a stream of empty speech bubbles, fills the air between and around their heads. Strangely, the heads recede, the air seems to get heavier. Rene Ricard once tried to explain this miraculous reversal of figure and ground to a friend who, failing to get it, said it was 'just the way [the artist] put the paint on.' Ricard was astonished: For him, as for Eisenman, the way the paint is put on is all there is.

Throughout the exhibition, layers of mediation accompany the physical evidence of revision. If the objects look drawn from life, the figures look drawn from memory. In 'Edie' (2025), a cat's head—ostensibly a portrait of Eisenman's pet—looks ancient, almost Egyptian, as if painted from the bronze sculpture 'Mad Cat' (2024) rather than from life. Even the children look alien. 'Hope Street with Freddy and George' (2016–2023) offers a glimpse into the obsessive revisionism that sometimes characterizes Eisenman's practice. She worked on the painting intermittently over a period of seven years, even showing it once (in 2022) before returning it to the studio, revising again. There is a benefit to the timescale here. It makes the contentment in the scene feel earned, but also uneasy. The lamp is on, the mood is tranquil, but the window reveals a bluish and blackening sky.



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Accumulation without waste is central to Eisenman's studio practice. Hence 'Banandelier' (2022), which is more or less what it sounds like: a lightless fixture hung with desiccated banana peels in lieu of crystals. Eisenman says she is not expecting 'Banandelier' to sell, but if it does, the buyer will receive a 45-second instructional video, titled 'How to Peel a Banana,' so they can make the assemblage at home. This is not a joke. Bananas are one of Eisenman's favorite foods and most beloved symbols, a fruit as reliable as the morning and as perishable as human existence. Here, she is referencing neither Andy Warhol nor Maurizio Cattelan but her fellow lesbian artist Zoe Leonard, whose sculpture 'Strange Fruit' (1992–1997), a tribute to David Wojnarowicz, features similarly emptied banana peels sutured back up with red thread. The banana, after all, is the fruit of slapstick—optimistic even in its own decay.



The beach paintings—'My Nightmare,' 'Fifth of July,' and 'Tidal Wave' (all 2025)—confirm what the interior scenes suggested: there is nowhere to go. In 'My Nightmare,' a lifeguard surveys a group of humanoids walking zombie-like into waves of shit. In 'Fifth of July,' the personification of a bloated empire wears a blue bathrobe and red-striped boxers, glumly walking a small dog past a heap of either spoils or detritus. (Viewers familiar with Eisenman's oeuvre will recognize elements from other paintings and sculptures, washed up as if from a trash barge.) Across these paintings, paint does different work in the same frame—thick and worked for waves and sand, flat and graphic for figures. Paint asserts itself as the figural (or the material, with all the resistance that implies) against the figure as sign. In both 'My Nightmare' and 'Fifth of July,' the horizon line is pushed nearly to the top, leaving the frame filled with sand, or water that looks like sand. The effect is of an hourglass, newly tipped and counting down from sixty. Time is running out. Eisenman offers, finally, her own angel of history in 'Tidal Wave.' She sits with her back turned to the future, her eyes fixed in contemplation, even as she tries to relax and forget the past. Escapism is a funny paradox, says Eisenman. A catastrophic wave is about to break.

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Caption and Courtesy:

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Nicole Eisenman

Fallen Angels

2025

Oil on canvas

76.2 x 61 x 2.5 cm / 30 x 24 x 1 in

Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein

Nicole Eisenman

A Good Place to Start

2025

Oil on canvas

148.3 x 112.1 x 2.5 cm / 58 3/8 x 44 1/8 x 1 in

Photo: Thomas Barratt

Nicole Eisenman

Leonard Street

2025

Oil on canvas

147.3 x 111.8 x 5.1 cm / 58 x 44 x 2 in

Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Nicole Eisenman

Self-Portrait With Deadline

2025

Oil on canvas

101.6 x 81.3 x 3.2 cm / 40 x 32 x 1 1/4 in

Photo: Thomas Barratt

Nicole Eisenman

Processing

2025

Oil on canvas

81.3 x 101.6 x 3.8 cm / 32 x 40 x 1 1/2 in

Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein

Nicole Eisenman

Edie

2025

Oil on canvas

40.6 x 51.4 x 2.5 cm / 16 x 20 1/4 x 1 in

Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein

Nicole Eisenman

Mad Cat

2024

Sculpture: Bronze and stainless steel with chair

Base: Marble and aluminum

101.6 x 78.7 x 63.5 cm / 40 x 31 x 25 in

Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Nicole Eisenman

Hope Street with Freddy and George

2016-2023

Oil on canvas

71.1 x 86.4 x 2.5 cm / 28 x 34 x 1 in

Photo: Thomas Barratt

Nicole Eisenman

Studio Table + Banandelier (Detail)

2022

Wood, plaster, raw wool, rubber bucket, magic sculpt, burlap, wood clog, swivel chair, banana peels, steel wire, chain, nylon cord, pulley, cleat

Overall dims variable

Photo: Thomas Barratt

Nicole Eisenman

My Nightmare

2025

Oil on canvas

165.1 x 208.6 x 3.8 cm / 65 x 82 1/8 x 1 1/2 in

Photo: Thomas Barratt

Nicole Eisenman

Fifth of July

2025

Oil on canvas

147.3 x 111.8 x 3.5 cm / 58 x 44 x 1 3/8 in

Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein

Nicole Eisenman

Tidal Wave

2026

Oil on canvas

76.2 x 61 x 2.5 cm / 30 x 24 x 1 in

Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein