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ARTFORUM

Hilary Pecis

JOSHUA LINER GALLERY

Hilary Pecis, Dinner Party, 2016, acrylic
on canvas, 40 × 30"

The capacity to recognize patterns is what sets humans apart from other animals and from machines. Our ability to convert perceived arrangements into habits and inventions drives our looking and imagining, our reading and reasoning. We are hungry to intuit serial sequences everywhere, even where there are none—a condition known as *apophenia*, which is linked to gambling and conspiracy theories.

On the brighter side of our brain function, Hilary Pecis's paintings seem to celebrate the joy of discerning and interpreting patterns in the everyday world. Nine paintings made up her excellent if modest showing in the back room of Joshua Liner Gallery, the largest canvases just over three feet in height. Still lifes or landscape views filled with color and patterns but very few people, their subjects were reassuringly ordinary, including a bowl of anemones, a cat sitting on a chair in a garden, palm trees bowing in the wind, a table just before being cleared.

A work reminiscent of Jane Freilicher showed a studio windowsill cluttered with jars of paint. Pecis goes one step further by clearly depicting the prices markered in black on the containers' lids—a diagram of numbers in front of a gridded view.

Gus's Jerky Shop, 2017, for which Pecis painted a gray brick building (a former gas station near Death Valley, California, that's become a destination for specialty dried meat) with its storefront window and bench plastered in bumper stickers and brand logos, was drabber than the other works, but still scenic. The artist's execution of decals, bricks, and mottled ground marshals an intriguing spatial order out of haphazard circumstance.

Museum, 2017, is a New Yorker–cover view of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's tiered ramps during the recent Agnes Martin exhibition in New York. Dark silhouettes of visitors and guards cluster in front of monochrome squares in soft gray, pink, and tan on each level. Pecis manages to make the overall composition evoke a Martin painting in a simple and effective homage: The bands of the floors cross over a subdued museum background with Minimalist grace.

The only other painting with figures was *New Year's Day*, 2017, though we only glimpse a hand of someone and the arm of another among an assemblage of hair-of-the-dog victuals recognizable to a certain demographic: guacamole with a lone tortilla chip sunk into it, sriracha and Tapatío hot sauce, a French coffee press, Fiji water, Bloody Mary mix or perhaps salsa in a blender, Tropicana orange juice, champagne, celery, a bottle of rosé. The opaque, spherical objects are interrupted by two faceted glasses in the left foreground, which begin to break apart the things they sit in front of into refracted chips of color—as if the start of a whole other painting.

This interior patterning also featured in the star of the show, *Dinner Party*, 2016, which channels Pierre Bonnard's and Fairfield Porter's still lifes. Both earlier masters used the table as a kind of surrogate for the blank canvas or palette, so that everyday objects become daubs of texture and materialized light as much as honeypots, saucers, and bread. Pecis embraces this genre with a riot of pattern. The table takes up most of the canvas, and its busy covering forms an abstract painting underlying all the objects on it: plates, wineglasses, cups, dishes, a bottle, and a lit candle. A few chairs are just discernible at the top of the composition; this almost negative space is painted in dark camouflage. Pecis's dishware is solid orbs, while the glasses are awash in filtered transparency. In addition to water or wine, each contains marks indicating reflection that also suggest a tiny abstract painting or Fauvist landscape. One can imagine that Pecis's canvases, with their neat brightness, all contain such portals, where the represented image bursts open into an inspired idea of its origins.

—Prudence Peiffer