

## MY PLACE, MY PALACE

Alexandra Barth, Aglaé Bassens, Max Karnig, Kate Wallace

06 June - 27 July 2024

Recent history remarked us the simple yet fundamental privilege of the *place* that we call home. The recent pandemic forced us to bring our awareness from frenetic lives back to our *place* and we suddenly embellished it like a very personal nest - bringing back attention on the intimate space we live in.

Indeed, a simple *place* can become a personal *palace*. It is the love, the care, the story telling of the objects that we collect in our daily life that transform an empty space into our own special palace. On the contrary, a sumptuous mansion can be just an anonymous architecture if life is missing.

Interestingly, through centuries of art history, artists never forgot to celebrate the beauty of simple *still lifes* - representing daily objects as noble subjects. Many artists then in recent history depicted their own studios or rooms as more interesting worlds instead of majestic spaces.

In this current group show, the invited artists explore the topic of *domesticity* both putting their lens on domestic objects or personal spaces with a special meaning related to their own lives.

This is the case for **Alexandra Barth**, who represents perspectives of her own house - and her practice gained so much more clarity when we visited her in Sanguinetto, a rural small town around Verona where she moved with her partner Philip in 2021. She welcomed us in a charming house from early '900 that they are renovating themselves room by room. This place has a special aura as I never experienced before, with decadent bourgeois vibes mixed with the modern touch of its new inhabitants. Alexandra and Philip painted each room with a vibrant color indeed - like the velvet purple of the painting "*Oval Mirror*" - and filled the spaces with objects and furnitures they collect from flea markets and from other artists. When we asked her about the focus of her practice on interior spaces of her own place, she explained that this interest is related to her culture - as she grew up in Bratislava, Slovenia. This country has been occupied for long time by sovietic regimes, that developed a brutalist architecture for public spaces: concrete buildings based on ideals of cold, poor, anonymous spaces. As a (maybe unconscious) reaction, people in Bratislava started filling their own private houses massively with objects, and every house was a mirroring of the owner's personality. Learning about that story, suddenly gave so much meaning to her "*Oval Mirror*" painting: the mirror is placed in her diningroom and it is the perfect representation of the bourgeois nature of that space that they inherited (as suggested by the golden frame of the mirror or the purple color of the walls) mixed with their own presence in the present history.

With a practice rooted in observation and critical analysis, **Aglaé Bassens** creates alluring and poignant depictions of everyday life. Each painting is presented from the artist's perspective and prominently features tender and meditative moments that reflect on intimacy, shared experience, and memory. The artist says, "*I like to paint images that are sincere and particular, yet could belong in anyone's photo album, using the everyday as a vehicle for collective emotion. I have painted scenes from my life as well as pictures found online: they could be my memories or yours, and the context could be celebratory or solemn*". The painting "*Grey Glasses*" included in the show represents indeed a modern *still life*: the photographic approach is loaded with a personal emotional perspective by the artist herself. This glasses could be everyone grandma's set of glasses, something anyone can relate to with memories and emotions.

Various fruits and flowers appear across **Max Karnig** paintings, their scrupulous detail drawing parallels to the way Dutch painters rendered chiaroscuro in their still lifes. The stage sets he renders are reminiscent of Juan Sánchez Cotán's still life paintings of vegetables, the defined ledges appearing like shelves in cabinet of curiosity paintings of the 16th century. But with all the art history he conjures into these small panels, Max's paintings have a contemporary vitality which brings them into the present. Hidden metaphors emerge across every of his paintings indeed. For the show he chose to represent a *Poppy* flower. This flower is growing widely in this time of the year in fields in Italy, as Max picked it in Tuscany during his residency at Villa Lena. But the Poppy Flower has also a strong symbolic meaning, associated to inner peace in the western world and to a luxurious beauty and success in eastern cultures. In every tradition though, this is a powerful flower with magical properties - fascinating alchemists and artists since ancient history.

Melbourne based artist **Kate Wallace** looks to record and translate her own experience of personal places through the dialogue of representational painting. Using techniques such as scale, cropping, blur, montage and detail, her works are concerned with the translation of memory and construction of past through painting.

"*A near empty room. A reflection on a wall. A detail dismissed*", writes Kate Wallace in her notes. Her postcard-sized paintings are infused with this description.

Drawing from photographs she's taken in her places of refuge, Kate's paintings are made up of a minutia of fine details using small brushes. By painting these sanctuaries, she is both memorialising yet also obfuscating her understanding of them, allowing her brushes to blur certain details. Writer John Berger wrote how photographs create a sense of immediacy because they 'stop time', whereas paintings are charged with an ability to 'encompass time'. Kate's paintings transcend photography by making way for the painted mark. The rooms Kate depicts are often unadorned, the focus instead on what isn't there. Belongings are spared definition in favour of soft lines and curves of the surrounding architecture. She takes inspiration from painters who conceive rooms with the memory of presence rather than occupied by life itself - setting the focus on traces and hidden clues of human presence.

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Gallery hours | Tuesday - Saturday, 11am - 7pm

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