

ART REVIEW

THE
FAMILY
MANSEBASTIAN
BLANCK'S WORKS
ARE SOOTHINGLY
ESCAPISTBy Robert L. Pincus
ART CRITIC

Looking at Sebastian Blanck's painting/collage "Becky," with its charming view of a young woman in a long dress seated at a piano, you might think, for a moment, that the artist was channeling John Singer Sargent or Winslow Homer. Nothing in the picture looks particularly contemporary: There are candles on top of the piano and a sweet domestic vignette is visible through the window.

No other picture in his solo exhibition at Scott White Contemporary Art looks that indebted to the art of another century, but all of the selections on view, taken together, create a genteel atmosphere that Sargent or Homer would have understood.

Two men gaze, from a slight distance, at a garden party; a slender woman, seated at a nicely set outdoor table, relaxes before a dinner party begins; the artist's wife and toddler son, seated in front of a window, share a quiet moment.

It's an idealized version of domestic life. There is no sign of strife; only repose and sweet moments. For those who think art always needs to deal with overtly weighty or dark themes, these pictures could seem placid. After all, hasn't dysfunctionality become the norm in memoirs and the mass media? But in an age when the worst forms of behavior get most of the attention, pictures like these seem like the equivalent of a soothing cup of tea.

It's a truism about art that it's not what is pictured so much as how it's depicted, how it's composed, that affects us. Blanck's subjects are easygoing, even conventional in content. But there is seductive crispness to these images, with their broad areas of color that give everything a heightened clarity. He achieves this style by creating the shapes in these pictures, large and small, as cutout forms.



Daydreaming rather than dining seems to be on the mind of the young woman in Sebastian Blanck's "Lily Before Dinner." Scott White Contemporary Art



"Isca and Hudson" is a sweet image of domesticity. Scott White Contemporary Art

Blanck, who is New York-based, had a first solo show at Scott White in 2006; at that time, he was working in oils and making painting with a far different look to them. The earlier pictures featured nudes in the shower and the subject was his wife. They were only remotely erotic, emphasizing the pattern in a shower curtain

DETAILS

Sebastian Blanck, solo exhibition

When: Through Nov. 7

Where: Scott White Contemporary Art, 939 W. Kalmia St., Little Italy

Tickets: Free

Phone: (619) 501-5689

Online: scottwhiteart.com

and other surroundings as much as flesh and female form.

These earlier paintings seemed an ode to the cool of Pop and the cool of a cosmopolitan realist like Alex Katz. The new pictures are closer to Katz in their stylish take on everyday life and their emphasis on family and friends as primary subjects. But while they are still highly formal, there is an underlying affection for his subjects that is unmistakable.

Blanck aims to please viewers, but he doesn't try to pander to them. Is his work escapist art, in that it ignores a world seemingly beset by social, political and environmental problems? Yes. But can escapism can be good for the psyche? Yes, if the art in question places humanity in a favorable light, which this work does, in its microcosmic way.

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