



Raiding the Fridge for Inspiration

By XICO GREENWALD, Special to the Sun | January 25, 2017

Philadelphia-based artist Aubrey Levinthal (b. 1986) raids her fridge for inspiration. She repurposes her leftovers, turning Tupperware containers packed with fruit salad and spaghetti into inventive still lifes. Milk jugs and the condiments in the icebox are arranged into formally rigorous compositions that show off Ms. Levinthal's feel for paint. Stroked, glazed, scraped and sanded, textured canvases here depict late-night binges and bubbling lasagna.



Courtesy of the artist
Aubrey Levinthal,
"Fridge Closing," 2016

"Refrigerator Paintings," a little exhibit in Chelsea now in its final days, is a breath of fresh air. Ms. Levinthal is a student of art history, and her unpretentious canvases of everyday subjects dialogue with modern masters, particularly School of Paris artists. Visitors to her show will leave reassured that the great tradition of painting is alive and well in the able hands of this millennial.

In "Microwave Mug," 2015, the lonely light of a microwave oven nuking coffee updates Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks," 1942, the urban American noir masterpiece. Here the glow in the night comes from a kitchen appliance, not a corner coffee shop, but both pictures capture after-hours solitude.

In "Cereal Eater" 2016, the vantage point is from inside the refrigerator, letting viewers peer out to what seems to be a loose self-portrait of the artist at the open fridge door, perhaps about to grab the last of the milk. The nearly all white picture is suffused with refrigerator light and the roughly painted figure recalls the Art Brut characters of Jean Dubuffet.

All but a sliver of canvas is covered over with a white refrigerator door in "Fridge Closing," 2016. The off-kilter design recalls playfully lopsided compositions by Pierre Bonnard. In an artist's statement, Ms. Levinthal explains, "I had painted an entire composition of food stacked to the ceiling, like it would be before a party. It was too crowded and flat and I didn't know what to do. And then I thought, I'll zoom out and put the door on top of the stuff." The formula-free artworks here are worked and reworked, each piece achieving its own unique pictorial resolution.

Ms. Levinthal is expecting a baby in February and papier-mâché sculptures of food displayed on shelves are labeled "Things I Crave, Pregnant" (Pop-Tarts, soft-serve) and "Things I Can't Have, Pregnant" (lox, beer). The artist says these sculptures are "sort of like characters from the paintings."

Though the artworks here are fun, even funny, Ms. Levinthal's achievement is profound. After all, translating the human experience into compelling works of art is what painting has always been all about.

Aubrey Levinthal: Refrigerator Paintings, on view through January 28, 2017, The Painting Center, 547 West 27th Street, Suite 500, New York, NY, 212-343-1060, www.thepaintingcenter.org

More information about Xico Greenwald's work can be found at xicogreenwald.com