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Jonathan Gardner

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For his fourth exhibition at the gallery, Jonathan Gardner (b. 1982, Lexington, KY) presents a series of new works depicting scenes of interior spaces mined from the artist's surroundings and refracted through his lens of formal invention. In a visual manifestation of his process, Gardner constructs hermetic compositions realized multiple times across distinct mediums – graphite drawing, oil painting, and, presented for the first time publicly, gouache paintings on paper.

Renderings of the same composition repeated and passed through a prism of materiality unfold contrasting psychological tenors that are never far from an undercurrent of unease. With orderly passages of crosshatching, decisive outlines, and smoothly blended gradients, Gardner begins with drawings on paper. The relationship between figure, object, and background recalls Edward Hopper's (1882 - 1967) description of image making as "imagination collaborat[ing] with memory...producing only that which is necessary."¹ Concise yet instinctive, the intentional pressure of Gardner's pencil cuts loose the superfluous visual excess of the observed world, refining his undecorated forms and mellowing his figures' expressions to an uncanny apathy.

In a departure from unconscious origins, Gardner calls on autobiographical sources. Much of this early developmental stage took place during a visit to his wife's artist residency in Florida, where the real-life street of *Cranesnest Way* shelters lush gardens dotted with palm trees. Gardner's faithful evocation of this landscape blocks out the horizon with a wall of grass, creating a kind of secret garden like other close quarters depicted throughout the exhibition. In *The Studio Visit*, another familiar scenario, a towering painting of an eye peers into the room, as if searching for entry to the artist's interior life. These metaphors distill confined quotidian scenes into explorations of interiority itself; their subjects engrossed in a private world of the mind, walled off behind the impermeable surface of the image.

Sealed inside this alternate dimension of the artist's invention, neither time nor perspective remains linear. Where depth and contrast abound in the drawings, a velvety flatness results from Gardner's gouache-laden brush. In these works, figure and ground interlock like puzzle pieces, shrouded beneath a mattifying veil that disperses both the physical light of our world and the diegetic gloom cast over each scene. Applied in fleeting brushstrokes, the translucent yet concentrated gouache colors recede and advance within the picture plane, providing a method for Gardner to consider possibilities for the subsequent oil painting and visualize how colors harmonize within the composition.

With the final turn to oil, the collage-like quality of the gouaches fortifies into tableaus built up in thin layers of paint. This technique reveals the interplay of waning light on the precisely modeled curves of a vase, a chair leg, and a column in *The Studio Visit*, pulling taut the eerie tension between these seemingly three-dimensional objects and the stubbornly flat perspective of their surroundings. In these resolved, polished paintings, the setting, cast, and props possess an unlabored immediacy owed to the gouaches and drawings that precede it. Each rendering hangs its inherently different expressions on the same compositional structures, and, like a constellation emerging at twilight, entices the eye to connect across the walls between the works.

1. Wells, Walter. *Silent Theatre: The Art of Edward Hopper* (New York, Phaidon Press Inc., 2007), 36.