

# ANTENNA SPACE

## Alexandra Noel in Conversation with Claire Shiying Li

CL: Claire Shiying Li    AN: Alexandra Noel

**CL:** Hi Allie! Thank you for taking the time to join the conversation. I would like to first congratulate you on the success of your first solo show here in China. This is the second time we work together - the first time was in Beijing and this time is at Antenna's gallery space in Shanghai. How would you describe the works in the second show in relation to your practice till today and what's the main focus on this show for you?

**AN:** Thanks Claire! I never really start working towards a show with a main focus. I start making things and then these things connect and speak to each other naturally, either while I'm making the work or maybe the connection will happen several years from now. For this show in particular I ended up working more serially. For some subjects, namely "tornadoes", "cakes" and "tables", I wanted to see them from many different angles, in different colors and textures, etc. My interest in these subjects usually comes from very simple or almost "dumb" ideas. For example, I was thinking about how much I love cake but sadly hate all the work that goes into its impermanence.

**CL:** I particularly love the show opens with the tornado series, which reminds me of the opening scene of *Wizard of Oz*, where tornado is not just an extreme weather that causes destruction, but also signifies a major life change for the protagonist. The dramatization of the narrow space near the entrance presents a promise of itself – a single event that marks the beginning of a meaningful journey. What was the thinking behind it?

**AN:** I was thinking more about the film *Twister* from 1996, which I think is like my generations' *The Wizard of Oz*. Instead of one tornado setting the stage and taking you out of reality, turning things

into "color", *Twister* is more like an amusement park ride or a video game, where the tornadoes just keep coming. They are like enormous, cartoonish babies with bad tempers; throwing trees and cows around like toys and flipping houses upside down like dollhouses. Meanwhile these comically small humans incessantly chase after them, trying to "figure them out." I'm not necessarily trying to take people out of reality with my paintings but I want to turn familiar objects "upside down".

**CL:** Are you currently based in Los Angeles? Did any particular figures or scenes in the city leave a strong influence to your work?

**AN:** I've been living in Los Angeles for a decade now this year. As cliché as it is, I think the crazy colors in the sky, the gray concrete and the film world here has had a strong influence on my work. The more you get to know other artists living here, and all over the world really, non-artists alike, the more you realize the majority of them are secretly or reservedly working on ideas for films, myself included. I like being around that shared awkward yet passionate energy. Even if your day-to-day focus is on art, there's a larger or different kind of "picture" to be made in film. And I think it can excitedly go both ways.

**CL:** We know many of your previous shows are situated in venues of more intimate scales, so the compressed scale of the paintings can comfortably embed in the wall almost like gems. What was your first reaction to the gallery space with an industrial scale and sense of materiality?

**AN:** The scale of the gallery was definitely intimidating at first. I've been making small paintings for a while now I started to fear their smallness was the only thing people saw and their

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presentation began feeling too familiar, like the same Morse code on a long piece of paper. I think the room built in the middle breaks up the familiarity, having the viewer's body movement mimic their eyes. A kind of narrowing in, like entering a womb or outstretched hands that are embracing you, squeezing you out to the other side.

**CL:** Would you consider large-scale paintings?

**AN:** I do think about making large-scale paintings often but I don't want them to look like my small paintings "blown up". I'd want them to do something different. If I find something to say in big I'll definitely do it.

**CL:** From reading your novel, I realized many of the seemingly arbitrary scenarios in your paintings are all connected in one story. It seems like the narrative in your writing and scenarios in your paintings motivate each other to develop further into one integral practice. How do you see the relation between two mediums?

**AN:** I can't really explain how they relate but some ideas should be written and others painted. It's rare for me to let them overlap but when they do I think of the paintings as "souvenirs" or ephemera from a story rather than narrative scenarios or stories in their own right. I don't necessarily think the paintings connect into a story but maybe more like a rambling poem. After I've titled a painting, that title can influence a story and then the story can influence a screenplay, and so on.

**CL:** I also want to mention the way you title your work is imaginative, elegant, concise, and twisted. The contrast of the abstract geometry and the real-life subject matter make the wry humor memorable. Did you come up with the title before the painting? For example, the *Incest in the Wild in the Snow*, and *We tell our dog what to do*.

**AN:** I'm not always sure which comes first, the title or the painting, when the title itself

often is the idea. For a while I had been giving the work titles that didn't necessarily have a visually apparent connection to the painting; it was sometimes something someone had said in passing or sayings I kept repeating in my mind like a koan. Now the paintings feel more like koans in themselves and the titles just say what they are. *Incest in the Wild in the Snow* depicts exactly that. I became interested in family trees and the funny act of tracing familial sexual relationships with your eye. I started wondering what a family tree would look like when it involves incest. Adding the element of snow allowed for the physical imprints of this hypothetical family.

*We tell our dog what to do* is also as it sounds. The blobby shapes on the two outside panels depict human tongues and the blob shape in the middle panel is a dog's brain, both tongues and brain being close to life-size scale. Like any pet owner, my husband Naoki and I are always telling our dog what to do.

**CL:** Two works on the axis, *Ice Cream Mountain Cake* (2021) and *Miniature Horses* (2021) are probably thematically and visually central pieces to the show. I admire how you draw references from pop culture and art history in a way that feels more empathetic than differential. Can you tell us a little bit about the references you make?

**AN:** In the painting *Ice Cream Mountain Cake*, I was referencing an episode of the children's cartoon *Rugrats*, from 1992. In the episode, the baby characters find themselves at a miniature golf course where there is a giant mountain of what they think is real ice cream but it's actually just a painted prop in the game. Watching this, as a near baby myself, there was a moment of frustration experienced along side these cartoon characters. The babies find out the ice cream isn't real but at the same time, I realized the cartoon in the TV wasn't and never will be "real". This desire to eat something that isn't even realistically rendered was a source for a lot of the paintings in this show. For *Ice Cream Mountain Cake*, I added

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oil paint texture to the “ice cream” scoops, something I could do in three-dimensional space where as the cartoon in the TV could not.

*Miniature Horses* references a herd of black miniature horses galloping through a field, something I saw in a video online. At some point their bodies align in the distance and it appears as if there is one large horse with several legs galloping. I immediately thought I wanted to paint this somehow and then realized it was similar to Giacomo Balla’s idea for *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*. At that point it became a reference to the video I saw and a painting that already existed. I like the idea of experiencing déjà vu with a painting, if you happen to be familiar with the painting that came before.

**CL:** Combined with geometric compositions, you applied textures to your paintings, as well as the enamel treatment to the side of the frame. The added dimensionality provides another angle to access the enticing sensation of the depicted subject matter, cakes, ice-creams, etc. Would you say the duality of lure of images and seductive nature of paint always been there for your work?

**AN:** I’ve always thought of paintings as being three-dimensional objects. I think it’s a common

and disingenuous interpretation not to acknowledge that they exist in space and come off of the wall, even if it’s only slightly. Even if their surface depicts something “realistic”, I want the smallness of mine to call attention to them as objects, which can give the desire to hold or consume them. Sometimes I want the paintings to come off the wall entirely sometimes, which is where my “sculptures” come in.

I’ve always looked at the sides of paintings when I go to see shows. Did the artist address them? Did they tape the edges to keep them clean or did they ignore them and let paint messily build up? Did they paint on unstretched canvas and then stretch it over bars? Frames used to resolve this issue but frames are rarely used anymore. For me, the enamel acts as a built-in frame, but sometimes I let the oil paint spill over the sides or let the enamel take over the face. I like that the viewer is sometimes rewarded if they look underneath.

**CL:** Your comment on the frame reminds me of Mondrian’s grid paintings - it’s always the sides that signify the work’s relation to the environment whether as an autonomous object or a beginning of the environment.

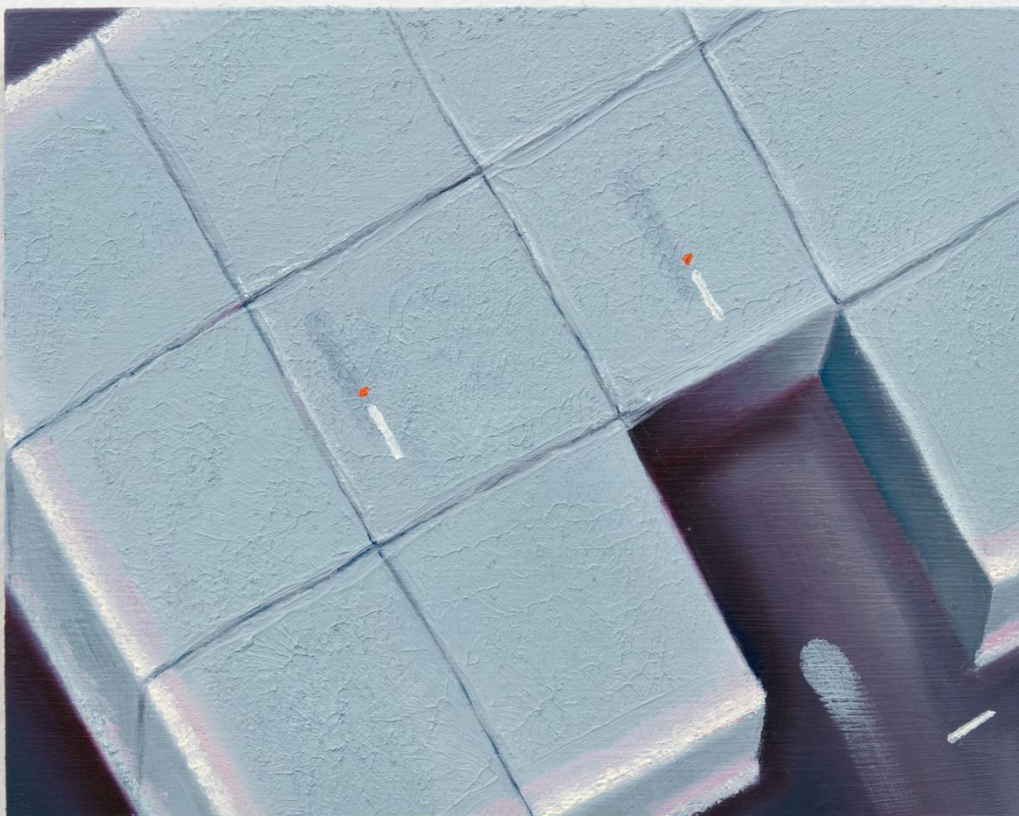
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Alexandra Noel  
*Storm Squatting with George*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
10.2 x 12.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space



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Alexandra Noel  
*It's a*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
10.2 x 12.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space

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Alexandra Noel  
*Chasing root*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
10.2 x 7.6 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space



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Alexandra Noel "Funny Looking" exhibition views

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Alexandra Noel  
*A Vampire at Home*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
30.5 x 61cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space



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Alexandra Noel  
*Incest in the Wild in the Snow*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
25.4 x 20.3 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space

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Alexandra Noel  
*We tell our dog what to do, 2021*  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
7.6 x 10.2 cm (3 pieces)  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space



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Alexandra Noel  
*Ice Cream Mountain Cake*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
12.7 x 17.8 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space

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Alexandra Noel  
*Miniature Horses*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
20.3 x 25.4 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space



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Alexandra Noel  
*Sliced Cityspace*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
8.9 x 17.8 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space

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Alexandra Noel  
*Fruit flies, mosquitos stagger, 2021*  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
10.2 x 7.6 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space



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Alexandra Noel  
*Leek Stew*, 2021  
Oil and Enamel on Wood  
10.2 x 7.6 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Antenna Space

## 亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔对话李石影

**CL:** Claire Shiyong Li    **AN:** Alexandra Noel

**CL:** Hi Allie, 非常感谢你参与这次访谈并回答我的问题。首先, 恭喜你在中国的第一个个展在这里获得了成功。这其实是我们与你的第二次合作了——第一次在北京, 这次是在上海的画廊里。你会怎么形容你在这次展出中的作品与你持续至今的实践之间的关系? 以及这次展览的侧重点?

**AN:** 谢谢你! 我几乎从来不抱着一个侧重点来开始一个展览。我开始做东西之后, 一切会很自然的相互连接——这样的情况发生在我创作的时候, 也会发生在作品完成后未来的好几年。这场展览中, 我发现我的创作比较趋向于连贯的“系列”。比如包括“飓风”, “蛋糕”和“桌子”在内的一些主题, 我想通过很多不同的角度、颜色以及质感来看待它们。我对它们产生兴趣的原因往往来自于非常简单, 甚至说有点“蠢”的主意。比如说, 我在创作蛋糕系列的时候就在想我有多喜欢蛋糕但是美味的转瞬即逝又让我很讨厌。

**CL:** 我特别喜欢这次的展出由“飓风”这个系列开启, 它们让我想到了《绿野仙踪》中的飓风不仅仅作为制造毁灭的极端天气出现, 同时也预示着发生在主角身上巨大的生活变化。展览入口处旁边的狭窄空间所产生的戏剧性仿佛提出了一种应允——一场由单一的事件所引发的意义之旅。这背后包含着什么呢?

**AN:** 我更会联想到 1996 年的电影《龙卷风》它更像是我这一代的《绿野仙踪》。电影《龙卷风》更像是一座游乐园或者一款电子游戏。那里有持续不断的龙卷风来来往往, 而不是只有一场龙卷风带你卷出现实, 将物体变出“颜色”。这些龙卷风就像巨大的、坏脾气的卡通婴儿一样——把树和牛像玩具一样扔来扔去, 把房子像娃娃屋一样翻过来。同时, 这些滑稽的小人类不停地追赶它们, 试图“搞清楚它们”。我不太想用我的画把人从现实中带出来, 但我想把熟悉的物体“颠覆”。

**CL:** 你现在主要在洛杉矶生活工作吗? 这个城市里有没有一些特别的形象或场景深刻影响你的作品?

**AN:** 算上今年, 我已经在洛杉矶生活了十年。这么说可能有些“陈词滥调”, 但我觉得天空中那些疯狂的色彩, 灰色的水泥, 包括电影中的世界都对我的作品有着非常强烈的影响。其实, 你越了解住在这里的艺术家, 或者其他各行各业的人, 你会发现这些人或多或少、有意无意地都在围绕着“电影”而展开他们的工作, 我自己也是其中之一。到处都是电影俱乐部。我喜欢被包围时那种大家都会产生的一种既尴尬又热情的活力。即使你每天的工作聚焦在艺术上, 但电影里仍然存在着更大的或者更不同的版图。我也认为我对这两个方面都会感到兴奋不已。

**CL:** 我们知道之前你有很多展览会在那些尺寸上颇让人感到亲密的场地举办——而你的作品会像宝石一样, 仿佛被镶嵌在墙上。画廊空间的大小和材料也许显得比较工业化, 你对它的第一印象是什么?



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**AN:** 画廊空间的体量确实让我感到望而却步。我一直都在做很小的油画，但我开始有点担心人们只能看到它们的“小”，以及也许它们看起来有点千篇一律——就好比摩斯密码那样排列在一张长长的纸上。我想展厅中间的构造出来的“小房间”，通过让观众行走路线模仿他们眼睛运动的样子，打破了这种熟悉感。这是一种变狭窄的过程，就好像进入一个子宫或张开着打算拥抱你的双手，在你进入后把你从另一头挤出来。

**CL:** 你会考虑做大尺寸的油画吗？

**AN:** 我会去考虑画大尺寸的油画，但是我不想它们看起来像是我的小幅作品“放大版”。我希望它们会有不同的作用。如果我找到一些东西需要通过“大”来表达，那我会马上去做。

**CL:** 通过阅读你的小说，我意识到很多在你画作里看似抽象的场景全在同一个故事里被连接起来。似乎你的写作和场景的叙事在你的画作里彼此刺激，从而进一步发展成一个整合的实践。你如何看这两者之间的关系呢？

**AN:** 我很难解释他们是如何相关联的，但是有些想法应该被写了下来，还有一些被画了下来。让它们两者重叠，这对我来说这很少见；但当它们重叠了，我会认为这些画作是“纪念品”，或者是从一个故事里来的短时效的物品，而不是本身有自己的背景叙事和故事。我不认为这些画作与故事连接，或者说是更像一个散漫的诗歌。在我命名一幅绘画后，这个名称可以影响一个故事，然后这个故事可以影响一个剧本，等等。

**CL:** 我想提一下，你命名你的作品的方式和描述文本非常有创意，优雅，简洁，并且扭曲。抽象几何和现实题材的事物的对比使揶揄的幽默印象深刻。你实在创作完画之前就想到名称了吗？例如，在“野外雪地中的乱伦”，和“我们告诉我们的狗要做什么”之中。

**AN:** 我并不总是确定名字和画，哪一个先来。有的时候，名字本身往往就是想法。有一段时间，我一直在给作品起名字，但这些名字不一定与画作有视觉上的明显联系；有时是某人顺便说的一些话，或者是我在脑海中不断重复的谚语，就像一段经文。现在，这些画本身感觉更像是口诀，而名字只是说明它们是什么。“野外雪地中的乱伦”正是描绘了这一点。我开始对家谱和用眼睛追踪家庭性关系的有趣行为感兴趣。我开始想，如果涉及乱伦，家谱会是什么样子的。添加了雪的元素后，这个假设的家庭就有了实体的印记。

“我们告诉我们的狗要做什么”这件作品也是和听上去一样的。外侧两幅画上的圆球状物体描绘的是人的舌头，中间的圆球状物体是狗的大脑，舌头和大脑的比例都接近真人大小。像所有的宠物主人一样，我和丈夫 Naoki 总是告诉我们的狗该怎么做。

**CL:** “冰激凌山蛋糕”和“微型马”可能是这个展览主题和视觉上的核心作品。我很欣赏你从流行文化和艺术史中提取参考资料的方式，这种方式更感同身受，且没有显得非常刻意。有什么具体的流行文化和艺术史的元素在你的实践中发挥了特殊的作用吗？

**AN:** 关于“冰激凌山蛋糕”这幅画，我参考了 1992 年儿童动画片“Rugrats”中的一个情节。在这一集里，孩子们发现自己在一个迷你高尔夫球场上，那里有一座巨大的山，他们以为这是真正的冰淇淋，但实际上这只是游戏中的一个上色

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过的道具。看着这一幕，年幼的我当时也还只是一个小孩儿，所以曾一度对他们所经历的感到沮丧。宝宝们发现了冰淇淋不是真的，而我也意识到，电视上的动画片也永远不会是“真的”。这种对没有被真实呈现的食物所产生的食欲，是这次展览中许多画作的灵感来源。我在“冰激凌山蛋糕”中的“冰激凌”勺子上添加了油画颜料的质地，这是我可以在三维空间中做到的，而电视上的动画片却做不到。

“微型马”参考了一群黑色的微型马在田野中奔跑，这是我在网上的视频中看到的東西。在某些时候，它们的身体在远处对齐，看起来好像是一匹大马迈开好几条腿在奔跑。我立即想到我想以某种方式来画这个，然后意识到这与 Giacomo Balla 在“Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash”中的想法相似。在这一点上，它成为了我曾看过的视频和已经存在的绘画的参考。如果你碰巧熟悉已经出现过的绘画，我喜欢这种在绘画中体验某种“似曾相识”的想法。

**CL:** 结合几何构图，你在你的画作上应用了纹理，以及对画框侧面的珐琅处理。增加的维度提供了另一个角度，而这使作品的主题的诱人之处昭然若揭——比如作品中的蛋糕、冰激凌等。你觉得图像的诱惑和绘画的迷人之处所体现的双重性一直存在于你的作品中吗？

**AN:** 我一直认为绘画是三维的物体。我认为，不承认它们存在于空间之中并直接从墙上下下来是一种常见并虚伪的理解。即使它们的表面描绘了一些“真实”的东西，我希望我的小东西能唤起人们对它们作为物体的关注，这能让人们有持有或消费它们的欲望。有时我想让画作完全离开墙壁，这就是我的“雕塑”的由来。

我去看画展的时候总是看画的侧面。艺术家有没有处理它们？他们是用胶带把边缘粘住以保持清洁，还是无视它们而让颜料混乱地堆积起来？他们是否在未拉伸的画布上作画，然后将其拉伸到栏杆上？框架曾经解决了这个问题，但现在很少使用框架了。对我来说，珐琅就像一个内置的框架，但有时我会让油画颜料溢出两侧，或让珐琅占据面部。我喜欢让观众有时看到了绘画的下面，会得到回报的感觉。

**CL:** 你对画框的想法让我想到蒙德里安的网格画——侧面总是标志着作品与环境的关系，无论是作为一个独立的物体还是环境的开始。

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

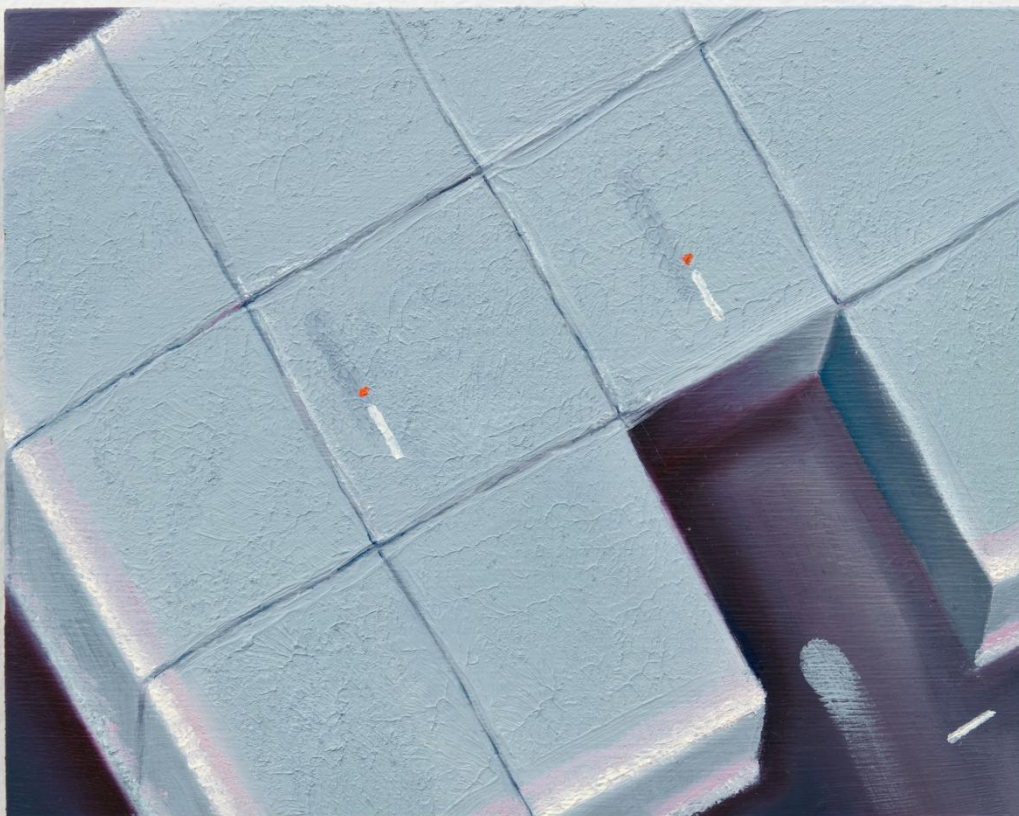
*Storm Squatting with George*, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

10.2 x 12.7 cm

致谢艺术家与天线空间

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

*It's a*, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

10.2 x 12.7 cm

致谢艺术家与天线空间



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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

*Chasing root*, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

10.2 x 7.6 cm

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔“相视可笑”展览现场



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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔  
*A Vampire at Home*, 2021  
木板上油彩与珐琅漆  
30.5 x 61cm  
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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

*Incest in the Wild in the Snow*, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

25.4 x 20.3 cm

致谢艺术家与天线空间



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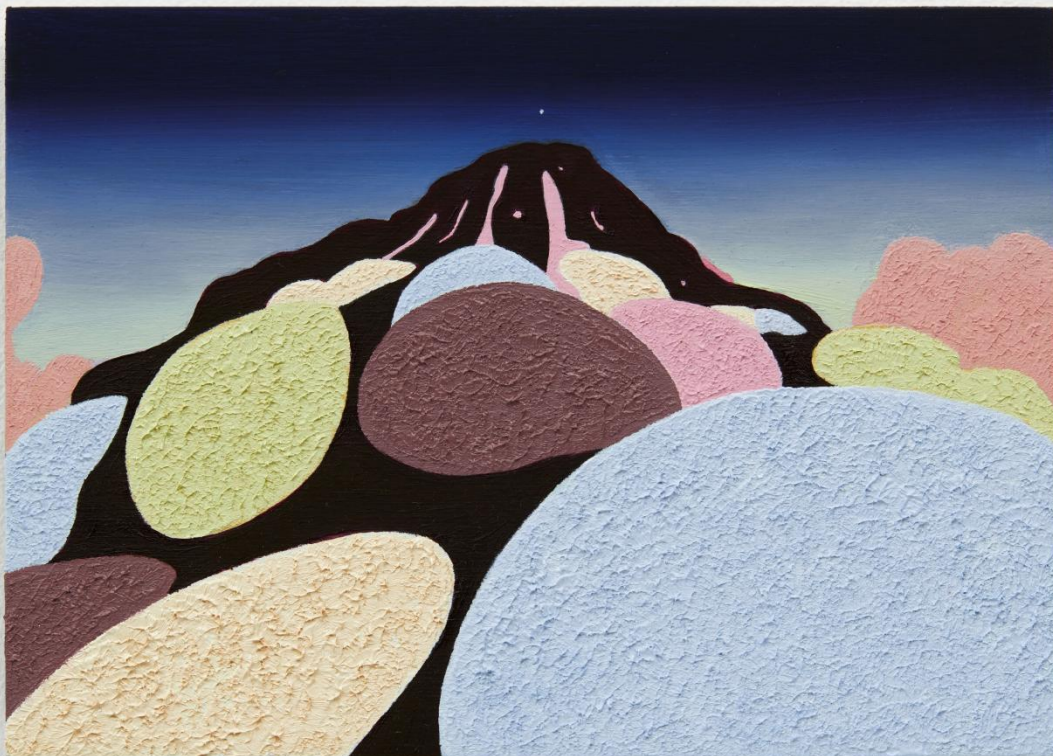
*We tell our dog what to do, 2021*

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

7.6 x 10.2 cm (三件)

致谢艺术家与天线空间

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

*Ice Cream Mountain Cake*, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

12.7 x 17.8 cm

致谢艺术家与天线空间

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔  
*Miniature Horses*, 2021  
木板上油彩与珐琅漆  
20.3 x 25.4 cm  
致谢艺术家与天线空间



# ANTENNA SPACE



亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔  
*Sliced Cityspace*, 2021  
木板上油彩与珐琅漆  
8.9 x 17.8 cm  
致谢艺术家与天线空间



# ANTENNA SPACE



亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

*Fruit flies, mosquitos stagger*, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

10.2 x 7.6 cm

致谢艺术家与天线空间

# ANTENNA SPACE



亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

*Leek Stew*, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

10.2 x 7.6 cm

致谢艺术家与天线空间