

# HESSE FLATOW

Carey, B. (2026, January 21). "Interview with Aglaé Bassens." *Yale University Radio WYBCX*. Online.



Aglaé Bassens, Photo: Jenny Gorman

Aglaé Bassens (b. 1986, Belgium) has a BA in Fine Art from the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Oxford University (2007) and an MFA in Fine Art Painting from the Slade School of Fine Art, London (2011). Her work has been exhibited internationally, with solo presentations at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; HESSE FLATOW, New York; 12.26, Dallas; Nars Foundation, Brooklyn; CRUSH Curatorial, New York; and Cabin Gallery, London; as well as group exhibitions at Gowen Contemporary, Geneva; STEMS Gallery, Paris; The Valley, Taos; and Workplace Gallery, London. Bassens's works can be found in the permanent collections of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami and Colección SOLO, Madrid, Spain. She lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.



Aglaé Bassens (b. 1986) "What was that", 2025, Oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 51 1/8 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist and HESSE FLATOW, New York. Photo: Jenny Gorman.

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Aglaé Bassens (b. 1986) *Stone Tiles*, 2025 Oil on canvas 51 1/8 x 39 3/8 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist and HESSE FLATOW, New York. Photo: Jenny Gorman.



Aglaé Bassens (b. 1986), *Deflated*, 2025, Oil on canvas, 51 1/8 x 39 3/8 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist and HESSE FLATOW, New York. Photo: Jenny Gorman.

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**BC:** You're listening to Yale Radio, W-Y-B-C. This is Brainerd Carey with the lives of the artist, architects, curators, and more. Today on our show, I'm talking with Aglaé Bassens. Aglaé, thanks so much for being with me today.

**AB:** Oh, thank you. It's great to be here.

**BC:** Aglaé, we're going to talk about your show, of course, at HESSE FLATOW Gallery. And I'm excited to talk about this show for a number of reasons, but I'm. Well, let's jump right into it. So, I want to talk about the different works in here and in your approach. But I also love the title, "Vacant," you know, it seems like a kind of marker for what could be. And I know it's been written about as a kind of these sort of actualist scenes, you know, this sort of emptiness of the subject matter. But it seems vacant and has a lot of meanings, right? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**AB:** Yeah, I do like to usually go for titles that both work in a very plain sense, like it is what it is. And that don't sound too opaque and just refer to the theme. But also like it when it has a potential, more psychological reading. And while I think of the word "vacant," I always think of someone who has a vacant style, who's like staring into the distance, and so all the way that you can imagine to fail what seems to be an empty space. So, I think that was part of it and also, to me, there was also like an association with the motel and vacancy, and also this idea of transience with traveling rooms and so it kind of has a few connotations that mean something to me for my personal life and the things that I look for in my works.

**BC:** And when you talk about vacancies in hotels and transience, if I can ask that, how does that relate to your past life? Is that part of experiences that were meaningful to you or the opposite?

**AB:** Well, I have quite an uprooted childhood. I moved every three years from age three to twelve, living in different countries, sometimes in a new language. And so, I feel like a lot of the way I look and crop and approach still life is sort of from looking and from outside, which is sort of how I felt through a lot of these moves, just when you don't speak a language, you rely on observation to understand what's going on. And I feel like there's been so ingrained in me that when I approach something, I just kind of try and question what it could mean other than the obvious thing. So, there are no object subjects in a way, like maybe that's why my paintings are often of quite plain everyday objects, because I think there's always some cultural context. You know, if it's a window, a window that doesn't open the same way in Europe or in America, or it could be like an AC unit. It's like these slide things that give you clues about where it could be or not be. And that kind of speaks to me. And so interesting, you know, I've had friends that, and known people that have moved that often, you know, usually because of a family with a military background, and that always seemed to me hard to understand how a child adapts so quickly, one friend who said, you know, his biggest goal was just to be normal, to not have an accent, to not be the kid that stands out. That also seems like an impossibility to me, you know, how to not be the new one.

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**BC:** And when you talk about observation being such a big part of it, I would imagine that's also a cultural issue, right? We're going to talk about observation in your work here, but also as a child moving around observation is also about, and just correct me from wrong, but it's about the culture at large, how to communicate with these people, how to feel like you belong, how to not feel like the other, the new kid.

**AB:** Yeah, definitely, and also just sort of figuring out how the people do things, you know, try and figure out how people react. A lot of it is also just reading emotions. If you can't figure out what someone's saying, how can you still say that something awkward just happened in the room, or that someone's upset, or like it's much more about reading cues in faces and environments and relying on words, which is, you know, kind of what painting does so well.

**BC:** Absolutely, so to talk about the works in the show and your process, as I understand these, all start with polaroids. Is that correct polaroids that you're taking?

**AB:** That's right, in this particular exhibition I started from polaroids. Previously I started also from photographs, but it was always a mix of my own photos, mostly taken on a camera or on my phone, and sometimes I would twirl through websites like reviews on Amazon or TripAdvisor to find, you know, some candid picture of a hotel room detail that I could use that felt like it was fair game to use that image. And I realized that I wanted to go into something that was more about the materiality of paint and of the photographs itself, and by doing polaroids I was able to think of it more as an object, unless it's a screen, and seeing the way that the colors developed, and giving up some control to some extent about figuring out exactly what I was photographing when I'm looking at you finder. That sort of helped me to think about how to paint them in a different way, so it's quite a small shift in terms of how I work the film, but it sort-of triggered something about the handling of the paint.

**BC:** Yeah, I love that idea, and to talk a little bit more about polaroids since this is a shift with this show, Polaroid is a curious choice, because it's at once an outdated medium, almost that medium that's been revived in the past several years. It's so fascinating, the kind of arc of polaroids, so I'm curious, again, why Polaroid is it the colors and more in the format, and if so, what kind of Polaroid camera and film are you using?

**AB:** I'm using. it's a good question, I don't think I even know the name of the model. It's one that I remember I bought because I had a flash, one of the new models, and it has a flash option, because I really like when I use photography that have a very strong flash, and that's kind of come back in fashion really now, but for a while I was looking for pictures like that's a e-bay, so great, these people take awful pictures of things they sell, where it's really harshly lit, and the flash is on, and very soft shadows. I kind of like that kind of hardness to the image and define space so well, when there's not much information, it gives steps to the painting and where the line stops, and so I bought that one, that model, that reason one with the flash thing, because I thought, oh, maybe that's like a way that I can create this flash effect, and then it was only through using it, I realized that it's actually triggering all these other ideas about how to use my approach to photography differently. But I think the old-fashioned thing

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Carey, B. (2026, January 21). "Interview with Aglaé Bassens." *Yale University Radio WYBCX*. Online. you're picking up on is the nostalgic aspect of the Polaroid, it's also something I thought about because I realized that I'm often drawn to painting things that may initially seem nostalgic, like, you know, an old friend with the wire, or an old alarm clock, and I've been thinking about that because I know that I know that I'm not interested, really, I think in nostalgia, but I think I'm drawn to analog sort of hardware technology, because it was clear from the object what it was for in a way. There's something more tactile about it, because I don't have figures in my work. You see a telephone receiver, you immediately think about a hand, you think about what it feels like to hold it against your ear or to leave someone on hold on the phone while you hop and do something and come back. So it's definitely over time, but it's more I was thinking about how everything hardware has a relationship to the body that's clear in the design that is lost now in more modern technology. And so, I think that was one of the things that appealed to me about Polaroid is that it kind-of celebrated that and incorporated that into the process of making. And it's also a format, right? I mean, there's, you know, I mean, to all photography, there's this kind of format that comes in that is peculiar to the medium and Polaroid has its own format, its own dimension.

**BC:** Is that also what you're using in the paintings? Is that a kind of Polaroid format?

**AB:** No, that's actually, that was a bit tricky because I don't paint in rectangles and I thought about going, I always paint the same size as usually 100 centimeters by 130 for like my standard size and I didn't want to change it to a square because I didn't want to make like paintings of Polaroids. I just wanted Polaroids to be a way to kind of become more conscious of the fact that I use photography and that is part of the making of the painting, and I wanted to give it more importance, I guess, in the in the process.

**BC:** So, it came more from there. I like that and let's talk about some of these works. What was that in 2025? This is a painting what look like fish in a tank. It's one of the paintings that's darkest in a way. There are others in here that have almost that amount of black, but this one is really kind of like the abyss, right? Where are we and what's happening now? So, let's talk about this one a little bit because it has this, it's the only one to me that feels like, you know, where are we? You know, what's happening?

**AB:** We kind of don't know whether we're in the ocean or looking at a tank or you know there's a reflection on there that hints that we are looking at a tank and very likely it is but there's also something really unusual about it including the right to left composition. Yeah, so it's I want to come a photo I took at the Coney Island Aquarium where I took my son and I was trying to take a picture of him but he I was still mastering the Polaroids camera and he ducked before I could take the picture so it's less with this picture of fishers that had a quality to them that appealed to me to sort of something ominous and some presence to it even though I'd missed the subject of the intended picture and I've painted fish tanks in the past I kind of like them as this sort of and it's like a metaphor for a small world isn't it like a sort of boxed in space and I've usually painted them empty or without fish and I also like the idea of you know fish tanks being used as decoration the way paintings can be like in a restaurant and making that that kind of slight joke was painting looking like a fish tank and it ended up ending up in a home to decorate the wall being like a sort of pungent chic moment but in this particular

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Carey, B. (2026, January 21). "Interview with Aglaé Bassens." *Yale University Radio WYBCX*. Online. instance I had the fish in because I had that you know that vacant stare that fish have and that's saying about goldfish having a three-second memory and it sort of just made me think about you know people applying on through dead daily routine and just being disconnected completely and not really thinking about their surroundings.

**BC:** I like that story so much you know especially if your son ducking out of the picture you know it's a wonderful child thing to do I want to ask you given that does your son figure into some of these works you know I'm always interested in how artists parents and their children sometimes interact creatively and this is an example of it though he you know unknowingly contributed to this but it is a contribution are there other contributions he makes in terms of how he sees or what he says or does impacting what you take an interest in.

**AB:** In terms of subjects this two paintings in the show that are definite definitely inspired or caused or related to my son but one is the deflated balloon that that is his birthday balloon that he I mean I've painted balloons for a long time before that but that's one year he was holding on to until it was just you know dying in the living room and I was sort of touched by his sadness about the celebration dying out and letting go of the balloon and I always I always like these like things we used to celebrate because a lot of the time it seems to me we used similar things to celebrate and to grieve like candles and flowers and there's a kind of language of again transience and brevity even in the most tacky party decorations I like that sort of high low contrast and the other painting is the large painting that's the most abstract probably I've ever made which is of a silver metallic slide from his playgrounds but cropped very tightly so it looks almost like an abstract painting right that slide right the one titled slide it's so interesting you know I mean to me I'm always in among many other things interested in a child's influence that way these are his objects.

**BC:** Does he also talk about your paintings and react to them and say things that are surprising or helpful?

**AB:** He's three and a half and yet in his toolbox but he does like to come to the studio and he's very interested to see the new work and recognize his what they are he's sometimes better at recognizing things out of context than adults and he wants to he told me today he wants to he doesn't want to go back to Jacob he wants to start working in Manhattan he wants to make paintings so I guess he's he must enjoy it I love that one's a really simple way sorry no going that he's like influenced me it's just that I look lower down all the time because he's short and I just find myself looking at you know a half meter lower than I normally do in rooms in in landscapes and there's like a whole world too fast a little bit lower that when we normally look and it's kind of opened up a lot of views like one of one of the paintings in the show is a flawed tiles from a trip with it to Belgium that was basically just because I'm constantly picking him up off the floor looking to him below.

**BC:** I love that let's talk about that stone tiles painting from the show and this is quite different than the others in a way in that you know it's very geometric it feels almost like if we didn't know it was stone tiles this might be just an entirely abstract painting but I mean similar to slide perhaps but this really has its own shape and intent it feels entirely about geometry but

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**AB:** It feels to me like this one is very different and I love the idea of just like the lower angle that makes so in sense but this also seems to occupy something different in terms of the context of the show yeah I agree that painting is a bit of a standout piece in the show it's a bit different I was drawn to it because of the sort of shadow to the left corner but this of ambiguous what is going on is it's the picture I took was just didn't have a lot of information and so just had the tiles and then couldn't really make out what was happening at the end of the corridor and it appealed to me that it was so there's something about geometry that doesn't hide you know it's just so you can't you know get away from the angles but then the fact that half of the image was obscured it was attention then and I liked but I did it was the hardest one I painted I really struggled to paint that one I painted the slide much faster than the tile floor I'm just I don't know me enjoy painting lines and more straight errors so I had to keep thinking of it as a as a place and not as a not as lines but still get the lines right it was a difficult exercise for me but definitely interesting yeah.

**BC:** This is fascinating you know in terms of the composition and the execution but also of the of the perspective really that you're talking about of your of your son of looking downward it's really in such a pleasure talking to you about this of course for listeners there's links to find out more and look more at the images that we're discussing before we go on to ask you one more question a little off topic what are you reading at the moment.

**AB:** I just finished reading recently "A Woman's Story" by Annie Ernaux, which is not exactly brand new, but I only got around to reading it recently and I really enjoyed it. I read it in a day, and it had me in tears by the end it so speaks to all the things that in a way I care about in the paintings but as in memory and place but it talks about some other's life. But it is very people-based and my paintings have no people but they are about what we feel as people and what we have in common as people so it felt like I kind of released to read through a description of similar subjects that I talk about but in a completely people-based way so yeah that was the latest thing.

**BC:** Thank you so much I want to thank you for putting together this show and talking with me today and again for listeners there's more links here to learn more or visit the gallery thank you so much for talking with me today thank you thanks so much for having me you're listening to Yale Radio WIBC this is Brainard Carrey with the lives of the artist architects curators and more.