

HESSE FLATOW

“Friday Focus: Aglaé Bassen.” *Parapluie*, Aug. 13, 2021.

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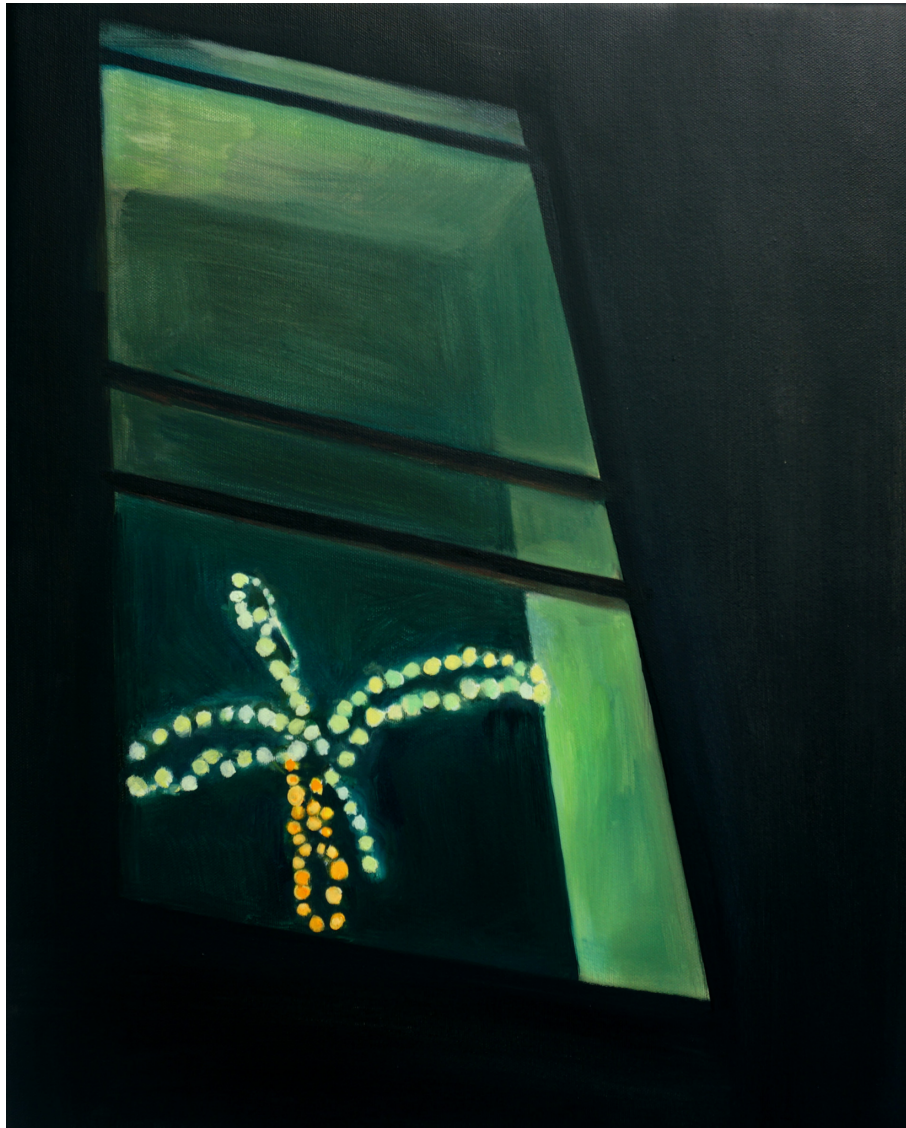


Aglaé Bassens (b. 1986, Belgium) is a painter living and working in Brooklyn, NY. Solo exhibitions include *Sincerely*, at Hesse Flatow, New York (2020), *Surface Tension* at Nars Foundation, Brooklyn (2018), *You Can See Better From Here* at CRUSH Curatorial, New York (2018) and *Front Parting*, Cabin Gallery London (2016). Recent group shows include *Shifted Horizon*, Hesse Flatow, NYC (2021), *This is Water, Workplace*, London

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(2021), *Fête Galante*, Heaven Gallery, Chicago (2020), *Still Here*, Newington Gallery, London (2019), *Chains*, Central Park Gallery, Los Angeles (2019), *HEADS*, The Java Project, Brooklyn (2017), Contemporary British Painting Prize, London (2016), *Biennial Of Painting: The Painter’s Touch*, Museum of Deinze, Belgium (2014), *PAPER*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2013) and *Jerwood Drawing Prize*, London (2012). Her work is featured in *New American Paintings No 134 Northeast Issue*, and in *100 Painters of Tomorrow* published by Thames and Hudson (2014). She 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).



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Can you tell me about your practice? How do you get started on a piece of work?

I would describe my work as still life painting. Stemming from my own archive of photographs taken over the years in various locations, my motifs are not always typical objects: they can be immaterial, such as shadows or reflections, and they can be moving matter such as rain drops and weather. The figure is nearly always absent, sometimes implied. I want the paintings to function as stage sets for dreamy, introspective contemplation, the focus is on longing and feeling. Typically, my process starts when I am stopped in my tracks by something I have seen. I take a lot of photographs, every time I have the instinct to stop and look at something. I then leads to painting as a way to understand what the fascination is about, to re-experience the feeling it triggered.



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Who or what are your biggest influences?

I am very inspired by films, the way they can use imagery and exploit it to its full psychological potential. Some favourites are *American Honey* (Andrea Arnold), *The Rider* (Chloé Zhao), *The Bridges of Madison County* (Clint Eastwood), *Rear Window* (Hitchcock), and *Elevator to the Gallows* (Louis Malle). I love how the camera frames the gaze much like the rectangle of the canvas does, and how film further directs our eyes through other 'looking frames' such as car windows, rear view mirrors, a gap through drawn blinds. The durational element is also something I think about in painting: how to convey the time spent waiting in a room, how much can be said in the time it takes to smoke a cigarette, or the time elapsed since the main character left the scene.

I also listen to a lot of music and spend a lot of time imagining and inhabiting the landscapes and lives described in the lyrics or suggested by the scores.

Last but not least, I am often inspired by literature, nearly always fiction. Important books for me have been *The Great Gatsby*, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, *Of Walking on Ice*, *Elephant and Other stories*, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

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Narrative is clearly important in your work, conveying a sense of story that either draws the viewer in or gives a sense of distance, can you talk a little about this?

Storytelling is how we communicate meaning and share experiences. I think we all have our own intimate alphabet of images or motifs that correspond to specific personal memories or emotions. I am interested in

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this connection between the universal and the personal narratives: that the impossibility of

truly communicating the deeply personal exists alongside the communal, shared nature of all emotions and experiences.

In my paintings I want the narrative to feel suspended, started by me but hopefully completed by the viewer.



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How important is the choice of material in relation to realizing the concept of your work?

I enjoy the constraints of painting on canvas, containing my work within the edges of the frame. I also like the kinship between the rectangle of the canvas and the other frames through which we engage with looking, namely glasses windows, cinema, phone screens, camera viewfinders, windscreens. Nothing pleases me quite like oil paint. It still feels miraculous everytime I apply it and watch it transform from an inert material to illusions of space and depth, textures and light.

What is your most important tool? Is there something you can't live without in your studio?

My studio setup has always been pretty basic. It's just the strictly necessary things: table, palette, brushes, paints and turps, stretcher bars and canvas. I bought a comfortable rocking chair this month and that's the first 'leisure item' I've ever had in the studio. I like to be in there to just focus intensely and work with full concentration, then leave when it's done. I'd have to say my most important tool is the right brush, as it is the extension of my touch and tunes the whole emotion of the painting.

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Can you give us a book recommendation that has been important in your practice? And tell us why it's important.

I first read *The Great Gatsby* as a teenager, and I have reread it quite a few times since. I relate to Jay Gatsby's earnestness or 'romantic readiness', as it is described. I think of my painterly nature as romantic with a touch of cynicism. Both are plentiful throughout the novel. Two quotes in particular have stayed with me, and I often think of them when I paint:

“Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and

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without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.”

“So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

It was also while reading the *Great Gatsby* that I became aware of the power an image can hold, namely that of the green light at the end of the dock, embodying Gatsby’s hope and longing.

Finally, is there anything new coming up that you would like to tell us about?

I am excited to show new paintings at Future Fair with Hesse Flatow in NYC this September. I also have two pieces on view in London right now in *This Is*

Water, a group exhibition at Workplace Gallery, which will end on September 12th.

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Image Order:

Controlled Outburst, oil paint on canvas, 100 x 130 cm, 2021

Palm Light, oil paint on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2021

Last Drag, oil paint on canvas, 24 x 28 inches, 2020

Another Day Over, oil paint on canvas, 16 x 20 inches, 2021

Laundry Day, oil paint on canvas, 100 x 130 cm, 2020

Staycation, oil paint on canvas, 100 x 130 cm, 2020