

HESSE FLATOW

Neuman, Barry N. "Regarding the Paintings Of Aglaé Bassens" *Whitehot Magazine*, Apr. 1, 2018.



"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

Regarding the Paintings Of Aglaé Bassens



AGLAÉ BASSENS, Installation view, Pink Curtains and On the Fence

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By **BARRY N. NEUMAN**, April, 2018

From the Standard High Line, it's only a short walk north to an exceptional exhibition, Aglaé Bassens' "You Can See Better From Here." The artist agreed to meet with the writer at the site of her New York solo debut to discuss her work and to express herself in greater detail afterwards via e-mail.

Barry N. Neuman: Most of the works in your exhibition, "You Can See Better From Here," at **Crush Curatorial**, feature windows and window treatments, such as curtains and drapes. How did you choose this subject matter, and what approach did you take in creating these works? Was the show, in any way, site specific?

Aglaé Bassens: Windows, windshields, and curtains have all been featured in my practice for some time as a motif for presence and absence. The curtains evoke the materiality and folds of the canvas itself, while the windows are simultaneously canvas-like flat rectangles and portals into painted space. I like the tension that occurs when the image of the window is cropped in such a way as to be quite abstract - almost like a monochrome - while also being a simple, ordinary, domestic subject. I am interested in the regional idiosyncrasies of windows; they

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open outwardly in England but inwardly in France, and many feature awnings and air conditioning units here in NYC.

For "You Can See Better From Here," I approached the theme from a personal angle. My upbringing was rather uprooted, as I lived in Belgium, Sweden, England, Turkey and, now, America. A lot of my childhood has been spent observing rather than participating for lack of speaking the local language. I moved to New York a little over a year ago, and the windows took on the meaning of looking in from the outside and searching for my own narrative in a city full of strange windows, lit up at night. The windows have become ways in and out of immersion and in and out of looking - a threshold between the hand and the eye.

Some of the works on view were made in my studio in Sunset Park before I knew I would be exhibiting at Crush Curatorial. The rest were made in response to the space, with its beautiful natural light and its wall of windows.

BNN: These works have great presence. They have a contemporary Northern European painting sensibility. They clearly communicate the weight and texture of paint and canvas. What drew you to painting, and, what for you is special about painting as a medium?

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AB: : I felt attracted to painting very early on. It requires a certain determination and abandon, and it holds you accountable. I feel that even with all of the modern-day means of creating at my disposal, painting remains the most direct thing I can do. You can't match its immediacy.

The way it simultaneously commands my mind, eyes, and hands makes me feel in the present more than anything else.

BNN: Two works depict chain link fences. One emphasizes the physicality of the medium and the substrate. The other tends towards abstraction. What attracted you to this subject matter? What do both paintings have in common for you? How did you decide to take different approaches to each?

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AGLAÉ BASSENS, Dappled Fence

AB: There are fences all over New York. It's not always clear if they are meant to keep people out or in or just to keep things out of view. I love the colorful tarpaulins, lining some fences. You can still see through them, and some are torn or slashed; this makes for beautiful, unintentional compositions. The fence struck me as an obvious, new motif; it's more urban than the window, and it's formally exciting because of how the

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repetition of the metal lozenges create strange optical effects against their background.

The small painting, "Fenced Off," emphasizes more of the physicality of the fence and its feeling of tension. The small scale makes the experience of viewing more intimate - something that rarely happens in real life with a fence. There is only the fence and its visible shadow on a non-identified shallow background. The painting doesn't really leave you anywhere to go, and the dried-up brushstrokes in the bottom half make the fence dissolve into the materiality of paint on canvas.

The larger painting, "Dappled Fence," feels more contemplative. There is light, space, and greenery beyond the fence. I wanted the push and pull in this painting to be more about the awkwardness of how the fence is painted - just the energy of the zigzagging lines interrupting the out-of-focus, fluid, green patches.

BNN: What was the inspiration for the works depicting pink drapes?

AB: I was inspired by the amazing Goya portrait exhibition, presented at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2016. I fell in love with the gorgeous, pink satin of the dress in "Countess Altamira And Her

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Daughter, María Agustina" of 1787 - 1788. I had this strange conviction that Manet had to have seen this painting and was inspired by the very same pink, which I felt I could recognize in his "Young Lady," of 1866, here, at the Met.

I also wanted to use that pink but in a way that's more applicable to still life. Then, I came up with the idea of curtains. In 2016, I made a painting of an empty sofa of the exact same pink. So, there has been an ongoing "pink envy."

BNN: Which, if any, artists have inspired you?

AB: In terms of contemporaries, I am inspired by Alex Katz and Lois Dodd. Lisa Milroy is a wonderful painter, and I love how far she has taken her exploration of still life into performances and installations. Beyond that, I look to Manet, Goya, and Velázquez for the ease and sensuality in their application of paint, their use of black, and their metaphors for the transformative nature of painting.

BNN: You've studied art and worked in many locations. What was it like to study at Oxford? How long have you been living and working in New York, and what has it been like for you here?

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AB: I've been very lucky to have lived and worked in a number of places. I have had studios in Istanbul, Assos (which is in the Turkish countryside), London, and New York. I've also been in residencies in Crete and Iceland. Travel inspires my work by allowing me to look at things from a different perspective - literally as well as metaphorically. Having always lived abroad, being a foreigner has started to feel like home, and I try to remain in that state of flux.

My years studying at Oxford were wonderful. The course at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art was very international, intimate, and supportive. There were only eighteen students in my year, and we were spoilt with amazing tutors, visiting staff, and lecturers. The best thing about studying there was living in a college with people who study subjects totally different from art and broadening my conversations and interests because of it.

I've been living and working in New York for a year now. I love Sunset Park, where my studio is located, and living in Brooklyn. I've enjoyed discovering how much painting there is here! There is a real wealth of young painters and a healthy critical discourse. It makes for a great support network.

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AGLAÉ BASSENS, Rainy Window

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BNN: What's next for you?

AB: "You Can See Better From Here," continues at Crush Curatorial through April 14, 2018.

I also have an upcoming solo exhibition, "Surface Tension," opening at NARS Foundation, Sunset Park, on April 6th and running through May 4, 2018. I am painting a mural for this new show alongside new paintings. The focus will be on the motif of palm trees, and I'll be carrying on the themes of fabric, surfaces and repetition.

I'm also looking forward to Issue No. 134 of "New American Paintings Northeast" coming out, as it will include some of my paintings.

"Aglaé Bassens: You Can See Better From Here," Crush Curatorial, 526, West 26th Street, Suite 709, New York, New York. Visiting hours are Friday and Saturday, from 12:00 noon to 5:00 pm, or by appointment.

"Aglaé Bassens: Surface Tension," NARS Foundation, 201 46th Street, 4th Floor, Brooklyn, New York, Monday to Friday, 12:00 noon to 5:00 pm, or by appointment.

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Barry N. Neuman was previously the New York editor of the online edition and an associate editor of the hard copy edition of "Boiler," Milan. Works of his published in "Boiler" include interviews with Matthew Antezzo, Carles Congost, Christian Flamm, Graham Little, Victor Rodriguez, Francis Ruyter, and Gordon Terry. He has additionally guest-curated group exhibitions at Team Gallery, New York, and La Panadería, Mexico City. Mr. Neuman received a M. A. in visual arts administration from New York University and a B. A. in biological sciences from the State University Of New York At Binghamton.

Photograph by Lance Evans

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