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Izzy Barber

James Fuentes Press

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Portrait on p. 152 by Dan McMahon.

**Cover: detail from *Venetian I*, 2019–21. Oil on canvas,
36 × 24 inches.**

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Painter of Distance

There will be, I think, an attempt to grasp again the surprise and accidents of nature and a more intimate and sympathetic study of its moods, together with a renewed wonder and humility on the part of such as are still capable of these basic reactions.

—Edward Hopper

To imagine the past is perhaps harder than to imagine the future.

Edward Hopper survives his time thanks to the intensity of his observation and the humility of his technique.

“No funny business,” he said, only turpentine and white lead and linseed oil and the progression from lean to fat.

It is moving and disquieting to notice that, almost a century ago, a painter and keen observer of urban life, imagining the future of his calling, would question if in the times to come—in our times—there would still exist those capable of looking at the world with a sense of empathy and wonder.

To paint from life means to choose a frame. We know from cinema that choosing a frame is an ethical act. Once Edgar Reitz, the author and director of *Heimat*, was heard saying while looking out of a car window: “Look! Everything we see is the opening frame of a film! But the film will begin only with the second frame and with the following ones, each frame a correction of the course of the story.”

A painter does not have this luxury, as they cannot procrastinate the telling of the story. For a painter, the first frame is the only frame, and the story must be memorable at first sight.

It is hard to imagine what Edward Hopper, a painter from life in the past century meant, by the word “nature.”

Probably, “nature” meant then, as it may mean now, a flow of perceptions reflecting an urbanized universe. The urban world we live in assaults our senses with its lack of harmony, order, and consolations.

The urban world is a paradigm of indifference and chaos: the apt manifestation of the modern

mind, bereft of any sense of the sacred and prisoner of a grim mechanical view of experience.

The flow of perception is undifferentiated, and only the blindness induced by our conditioning saves us from drowning in our perceptions and being swept away into madness.

In the Buddhist tradition it is said that *perception is exaggerated*. How does one paint from life without being swept away by the details?

How does one paint from life without succumbing to the innate exaggeration of perception?

One has to accept the conventions of the mind or perish. Painting from life means, then, to negotiate the path of one’s singular point of view among the conventions that make it recognizable to others—and to still keep that path fresh and unique, intimate and surprising.

Izzy Barber paints from life.

Izzy Barber is not a painter of life but a painter of the distance from life.

Painting from life, Izzy Barber has chosen specific outdoor locations. *Last Call* is a group of paintings executed while sitting at a bar at night.

Chinatown is the location and the title of another group of night paintings.

Downtown Lights comprises paintings made on the platform of a subway station open to the night sky.

Izzy Barber looks at the world from a distance. She paints that distance.

It is the distance one feels from the crowd at the bar, when words collapse to the floor drenched in beer, the world becomes a silent film, and—slightly tipsy—we see friends and strangers overlap and trade places as shadow puppets in a theater play.

It is the distance Chinatown has traditionally been an emblem of—ordinary activities appearing extraordinary thanks to the veils of language, habit, and race.

It is the distance of solitude, the solitude of remote stars in the sky reflecting the solitude of the passengers on the subway platform who wait for an early train as the city switches the street lamps off and descends into the uncertainty of twilight.

Distance in the paintings of Izzy Barber is also the distance of light from darkness.

Luminaires lights at street fairs, lanterns in Chinatown, street lamps, fire works, a bridge in the distance, a canopy of stars, a bright window in a darkened building, scratches of light in motion surrounding a central core of darkness, an exit or an entrance, untouched by the crowds inhabiting the painting, crowds clothed in dresses the color of flesh tones. At the bar, at the fair, in Chinatown, in the subway there is a heart of darkness inviting our eye to rest or to flee—we do not know.

The distance in the paintings of Izzy Barber is also the distance of silence from noise. The

silence is suggested by the diminutive size of her paintings, an indication that, when she paints the clamor of the bar, the fireworks in Chinatown, or the rumble of the train, her witnessing is a self-facing act. Painting, to her, means to see without being seen.

Contrary to Edward Hopper, who said, “More comes out of me when I improvise,” Izzy Barber, who has chosen improvisation and the instability of outdoor painting, might say, “I reveal less of me when I improvise.”

This is what makes her work paradoxical and contemporary. In her paintings, Izzy Barber signals the presence of her gaze, without ever telling us who she is.





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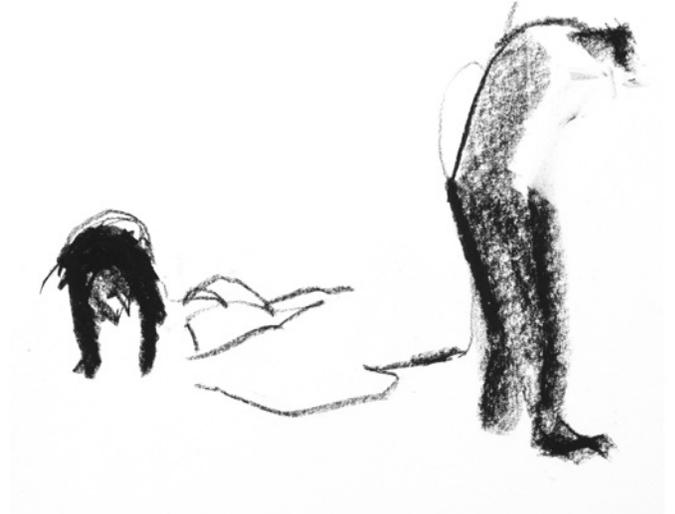
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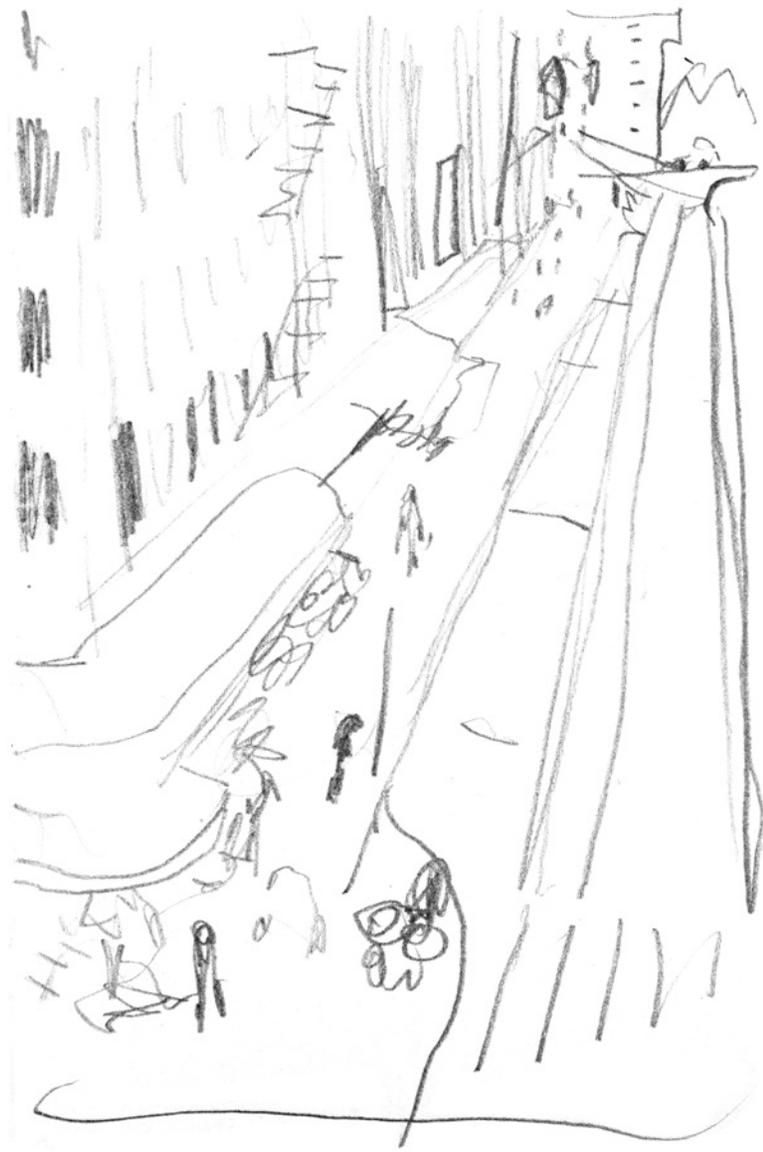




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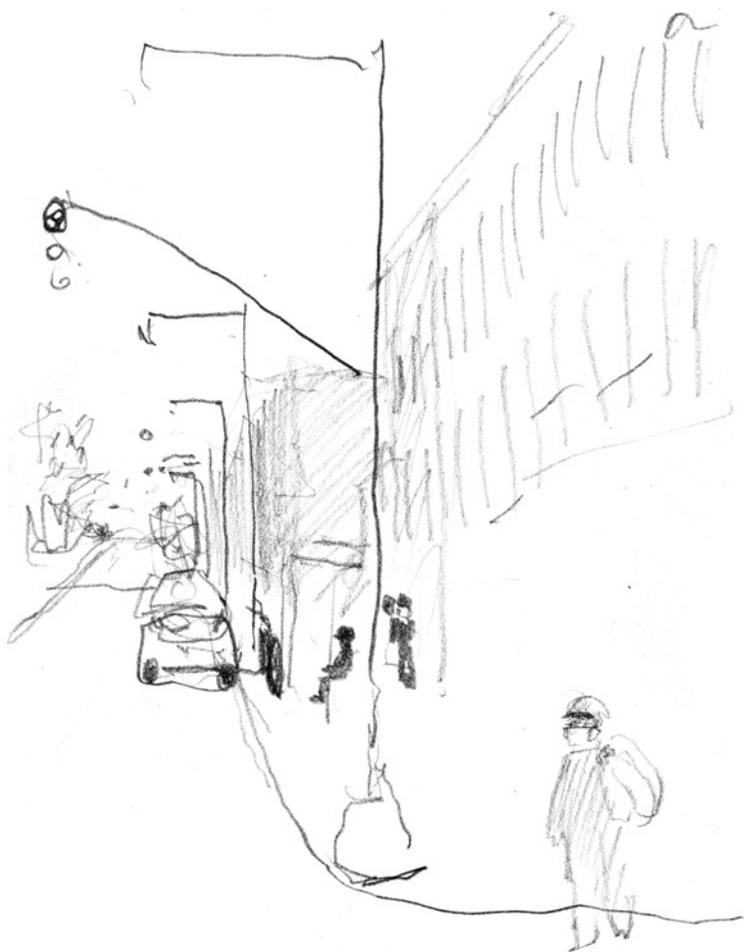


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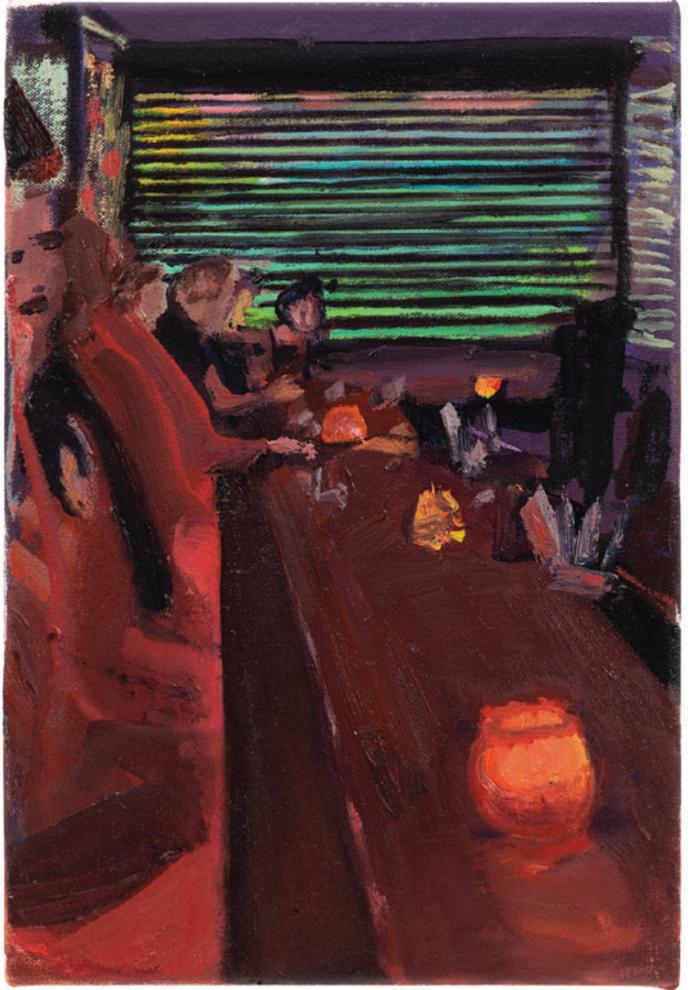


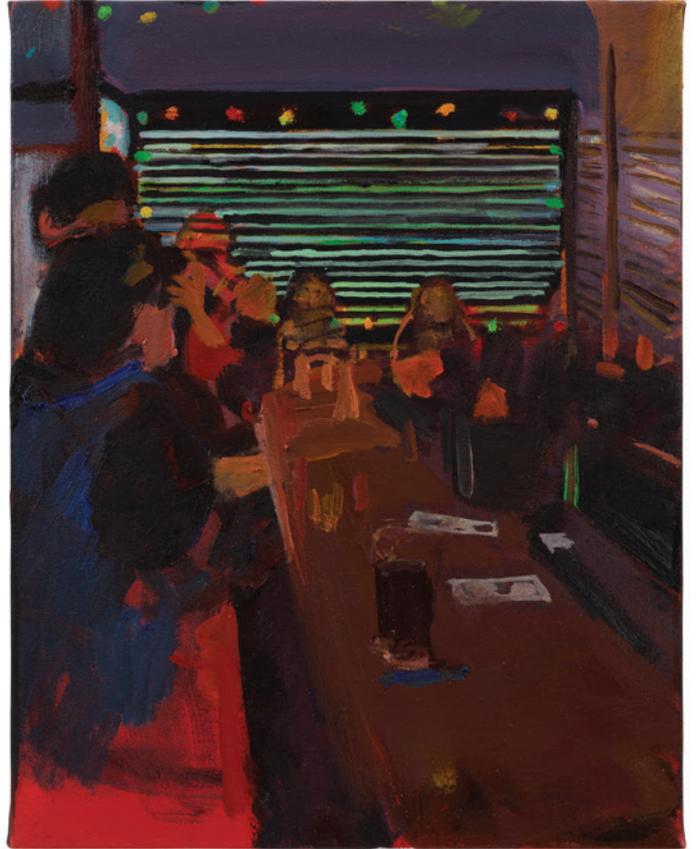






Last Call







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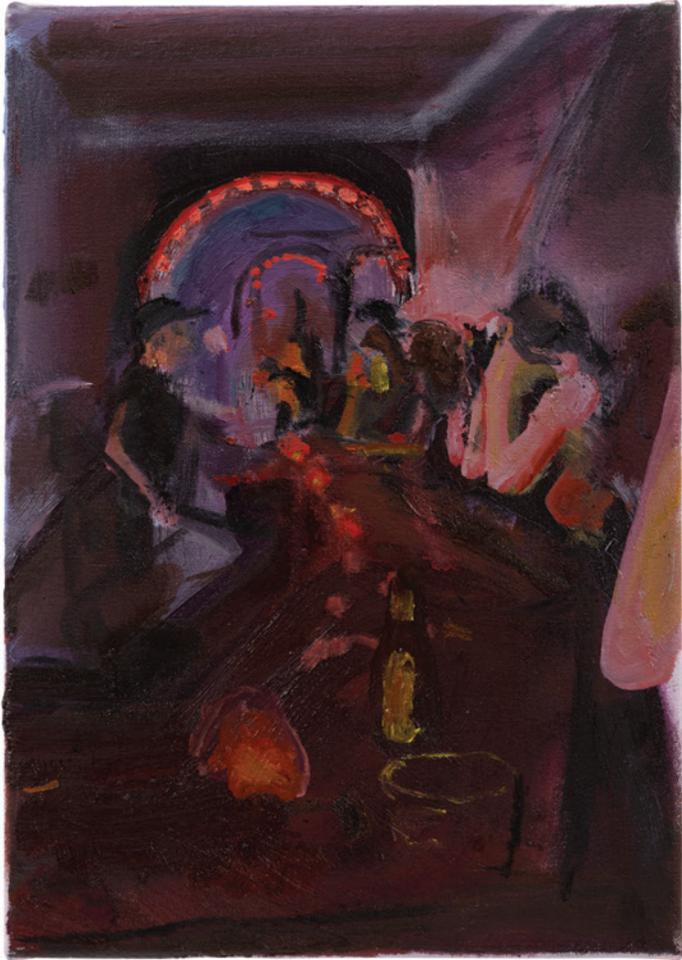


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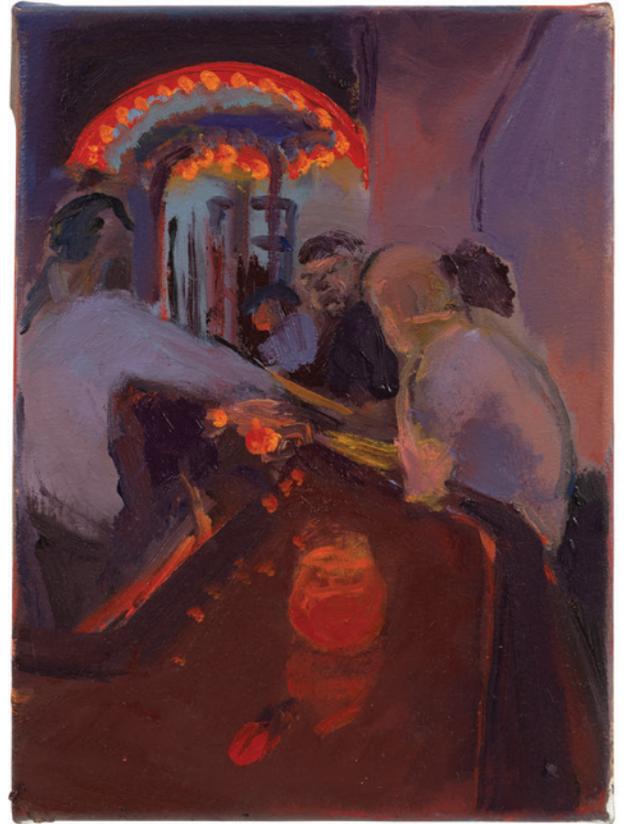




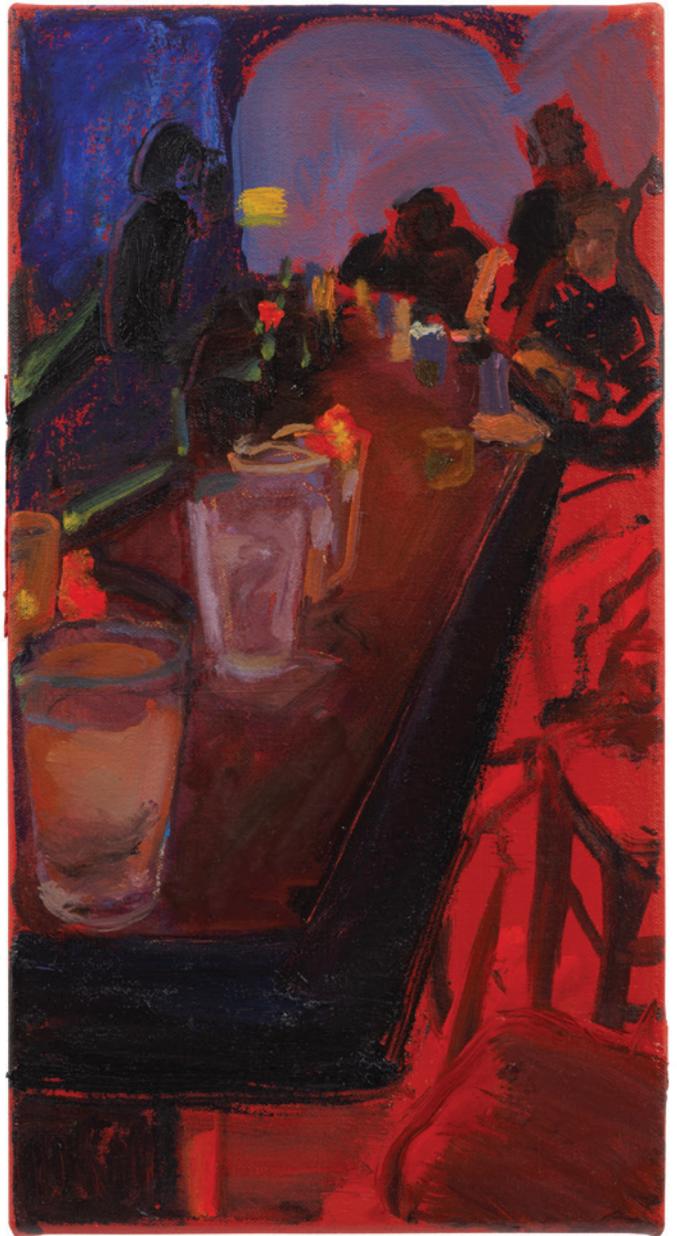


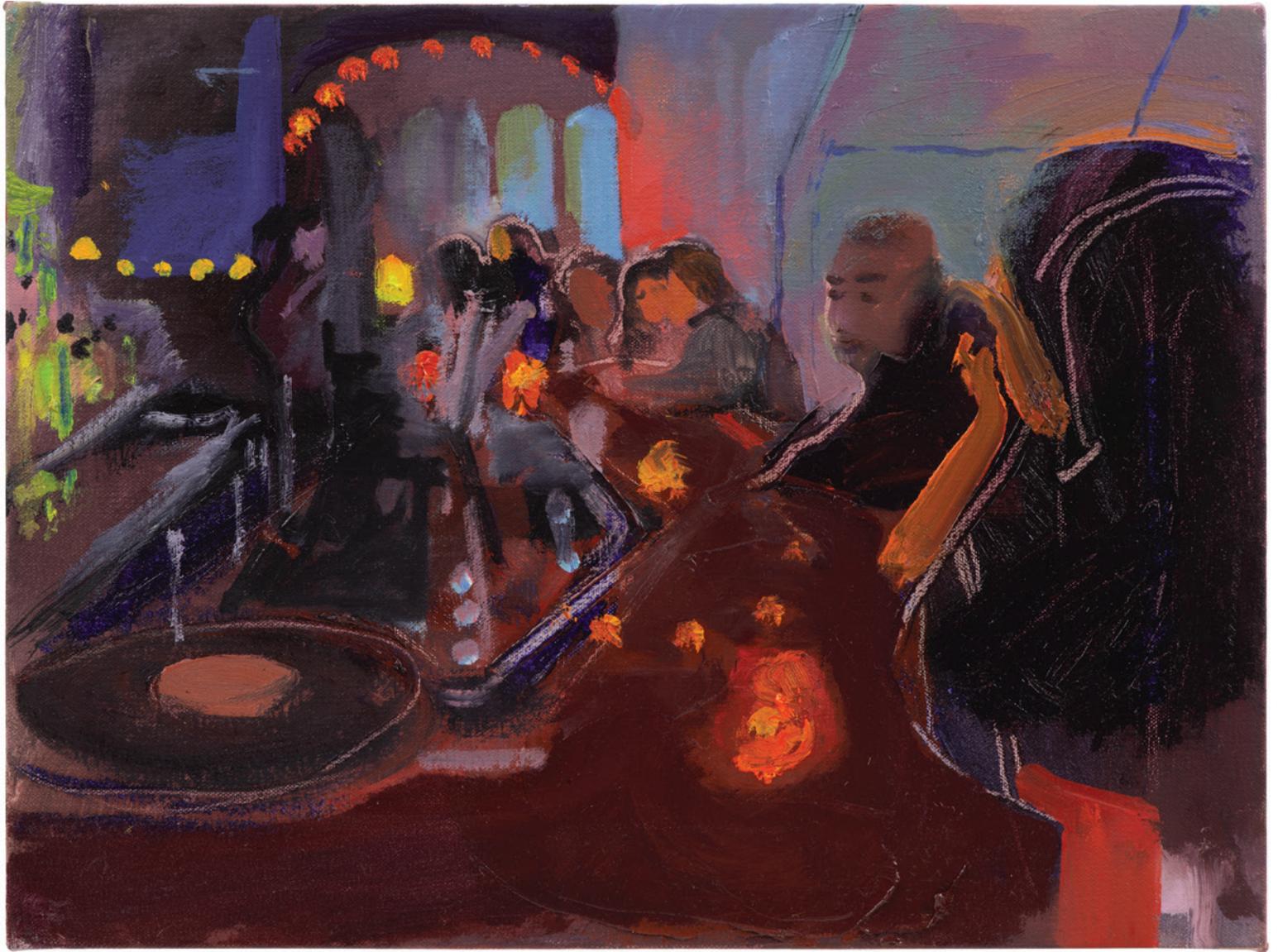


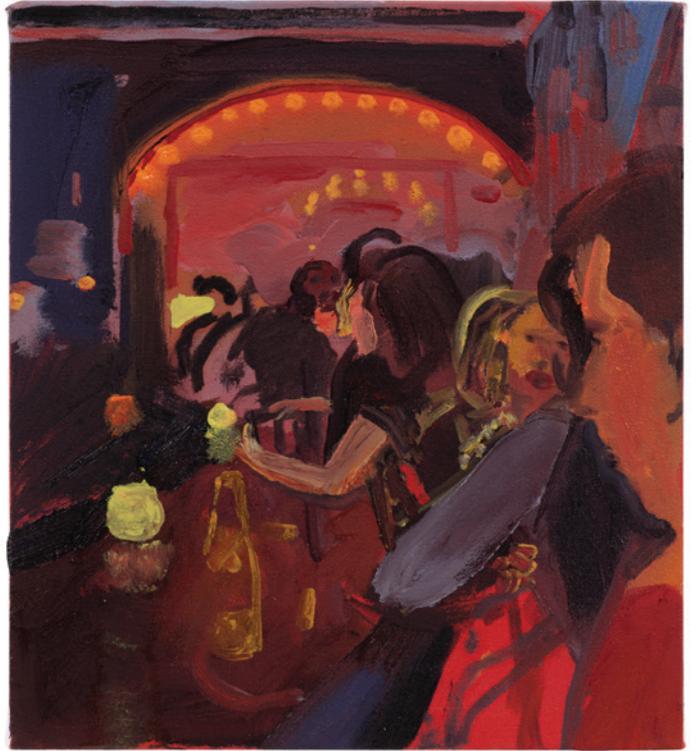
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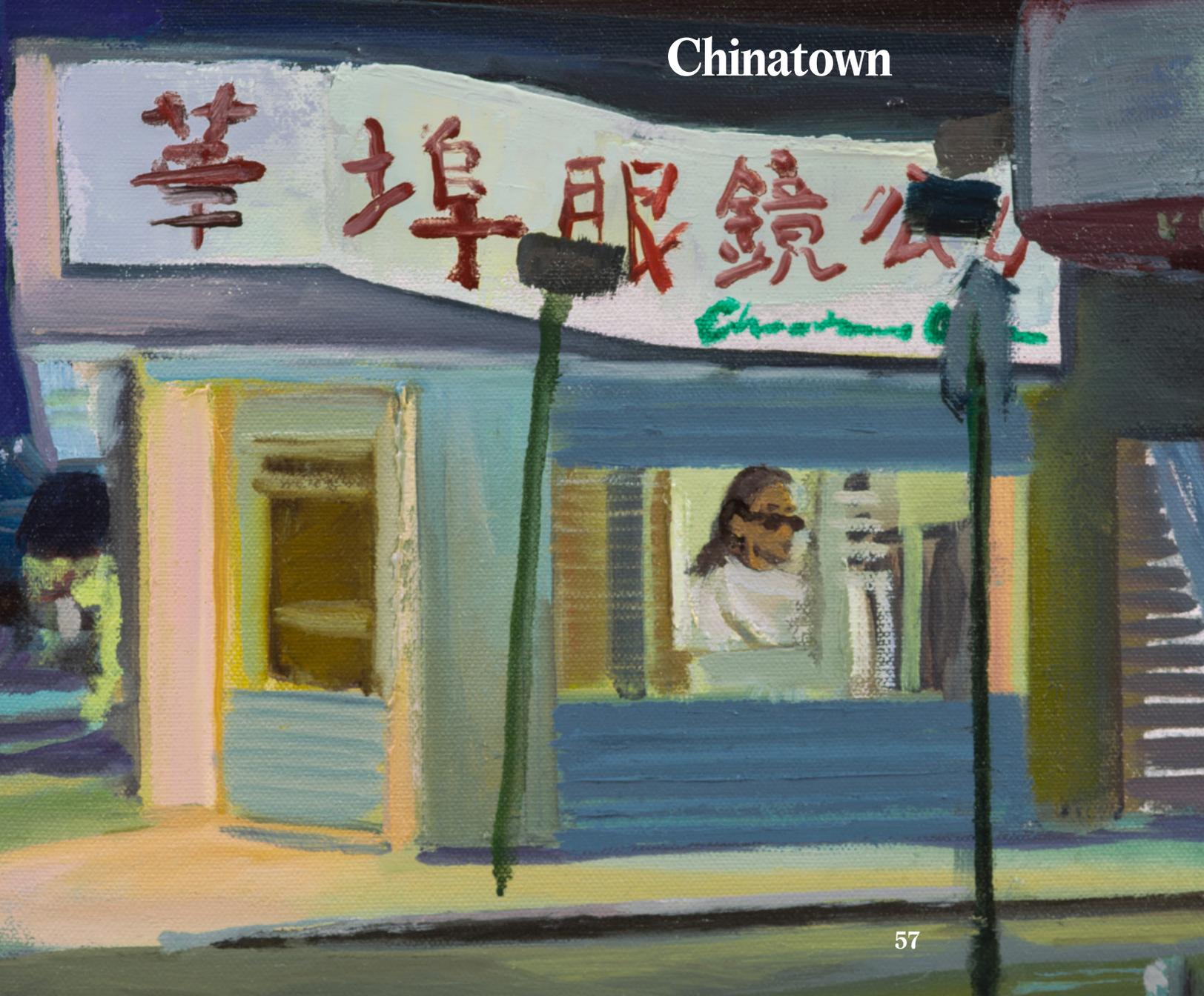
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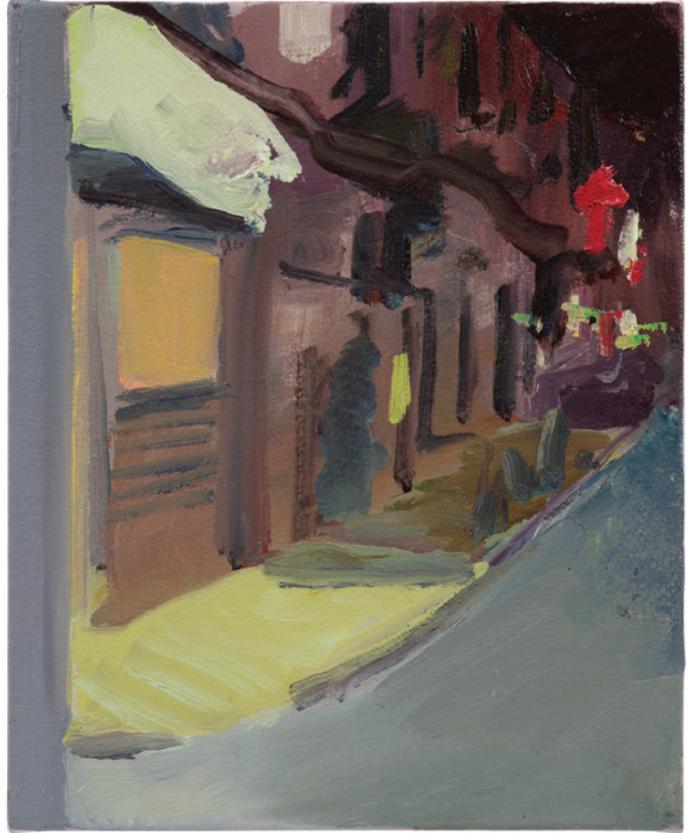


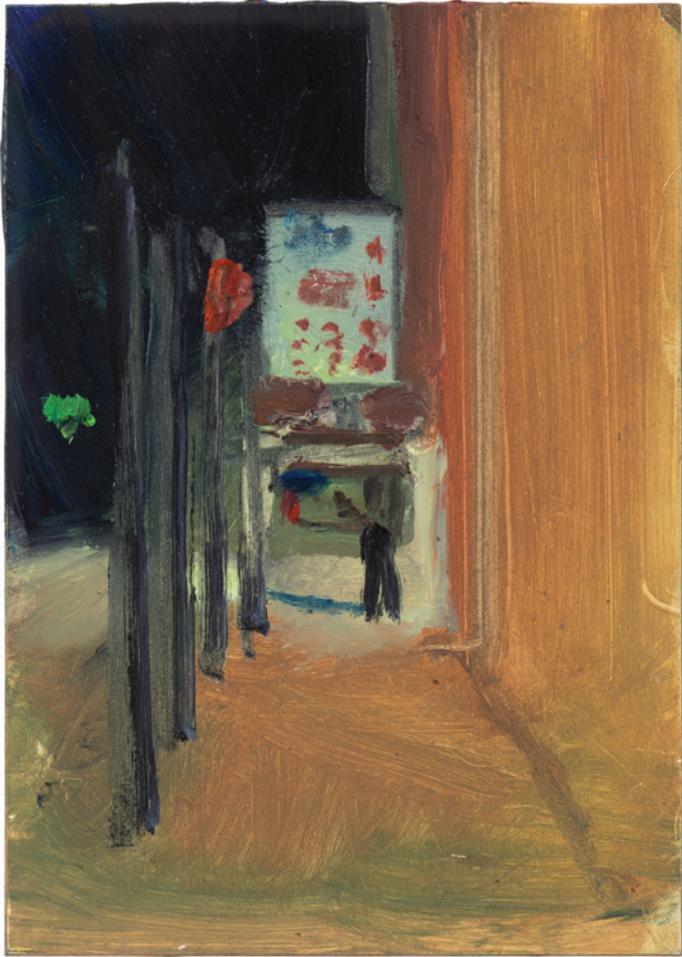




Chinatown







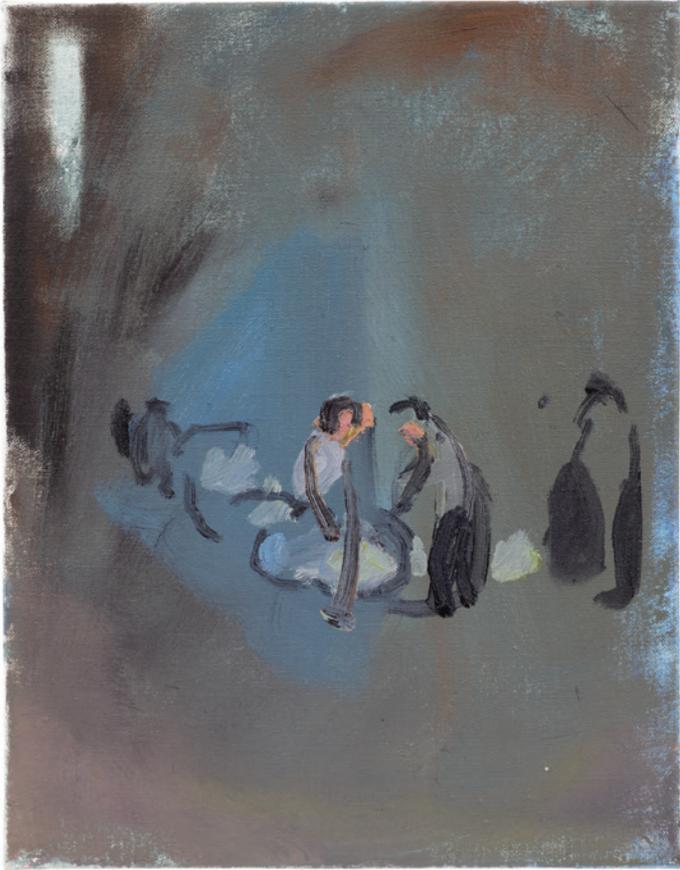


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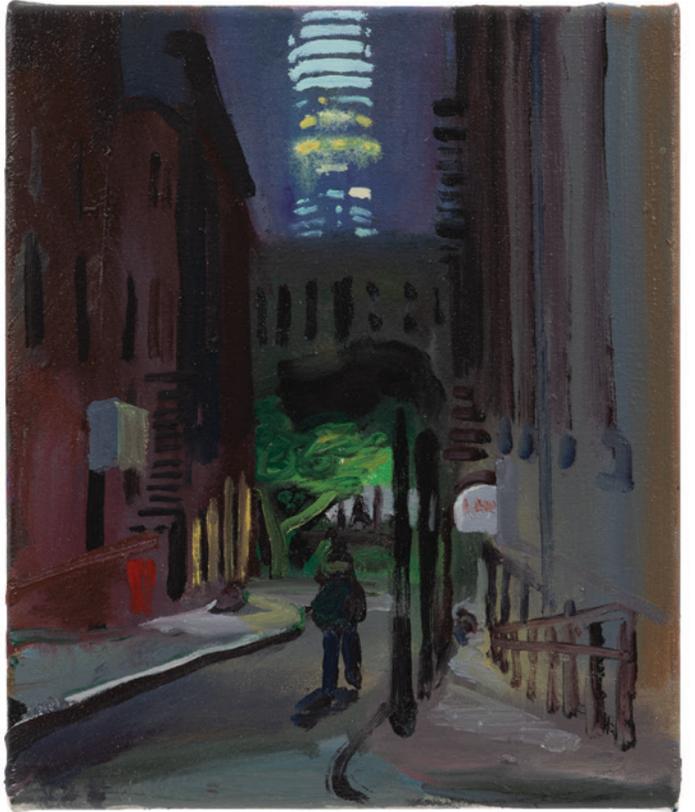


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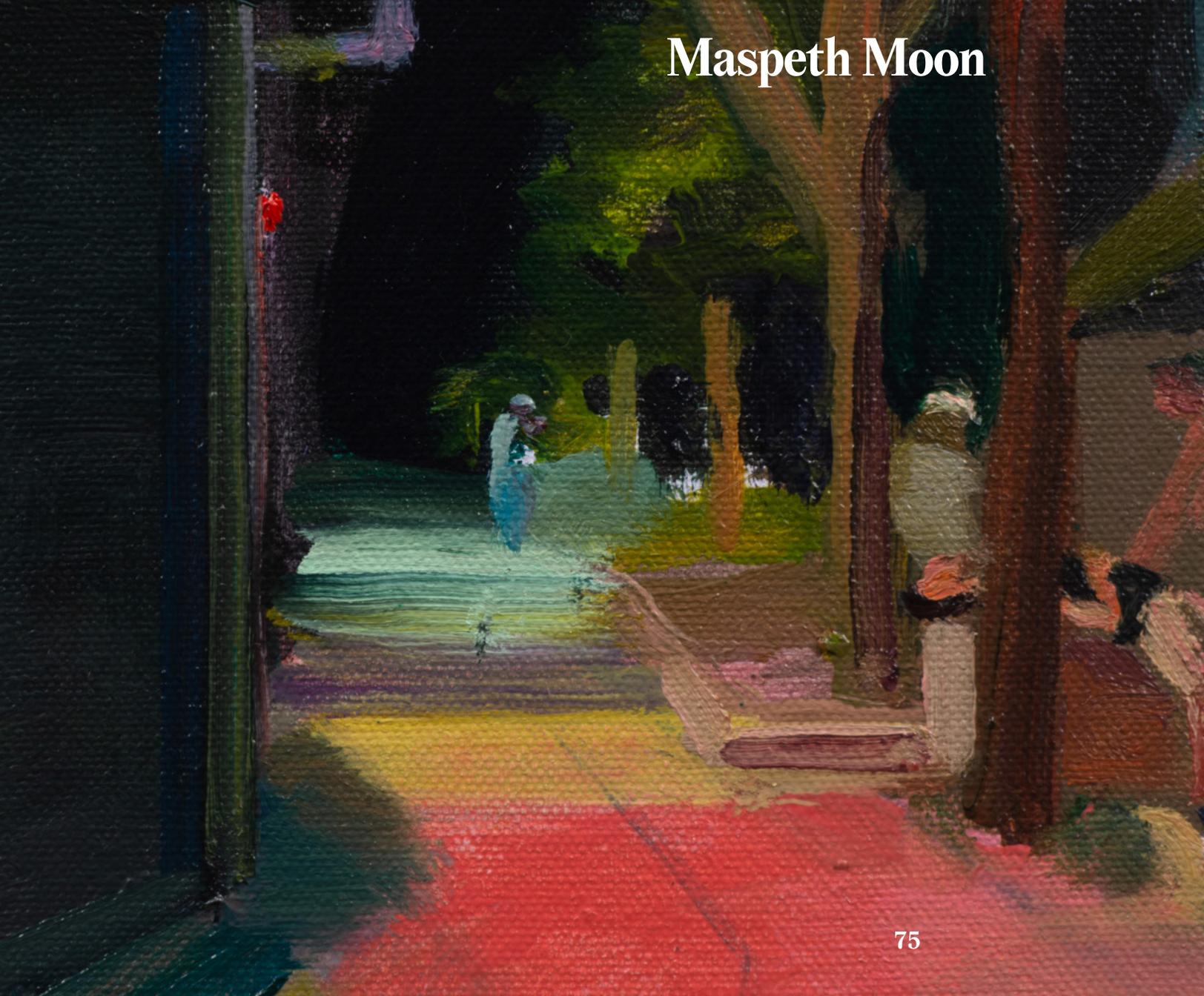
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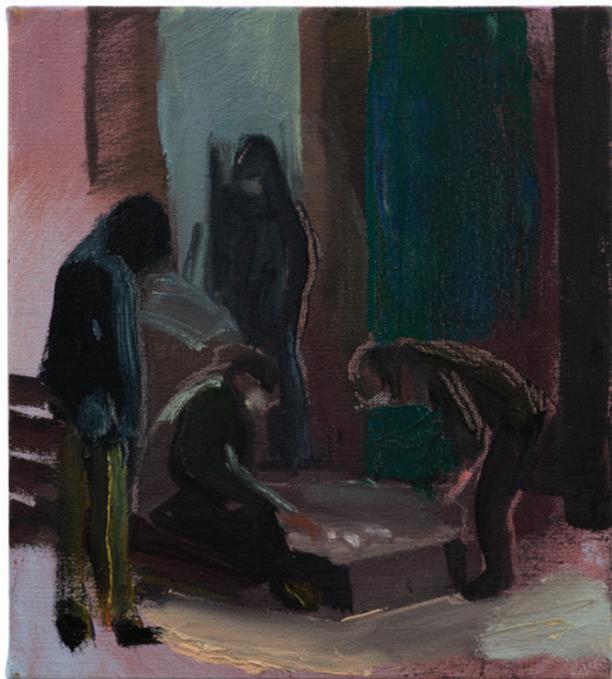
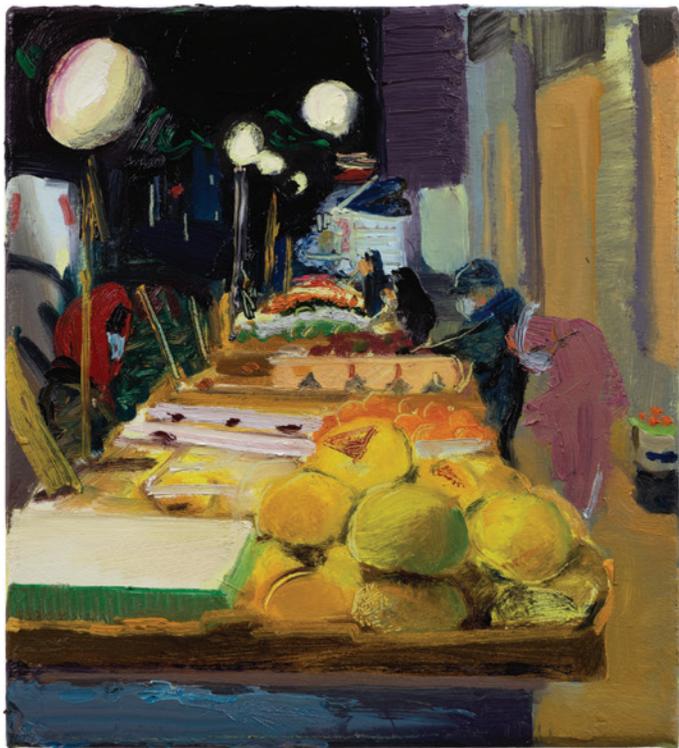
Maspeth Moon



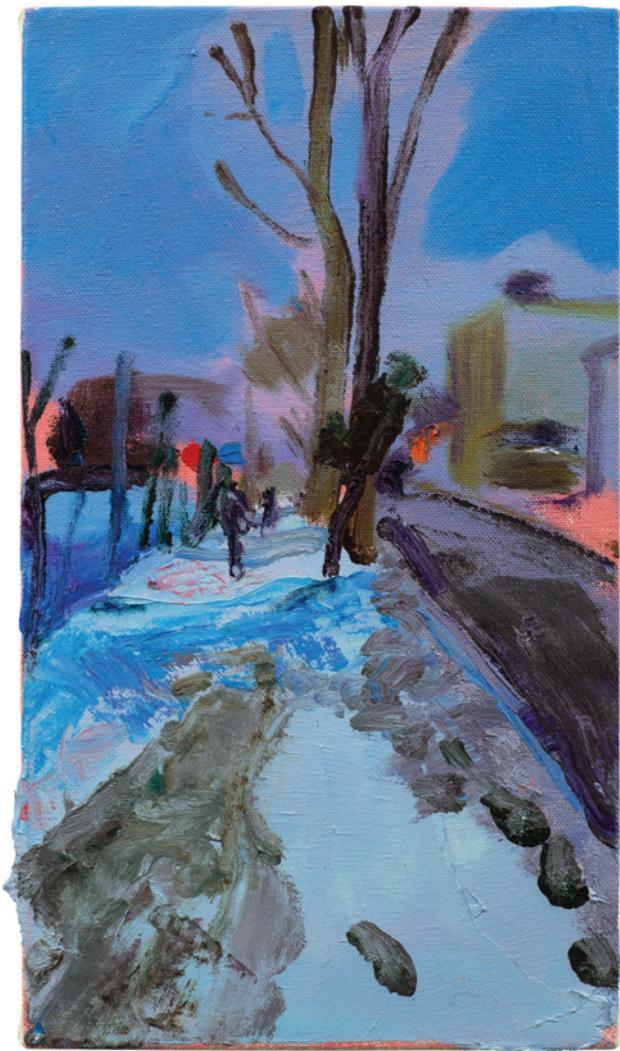




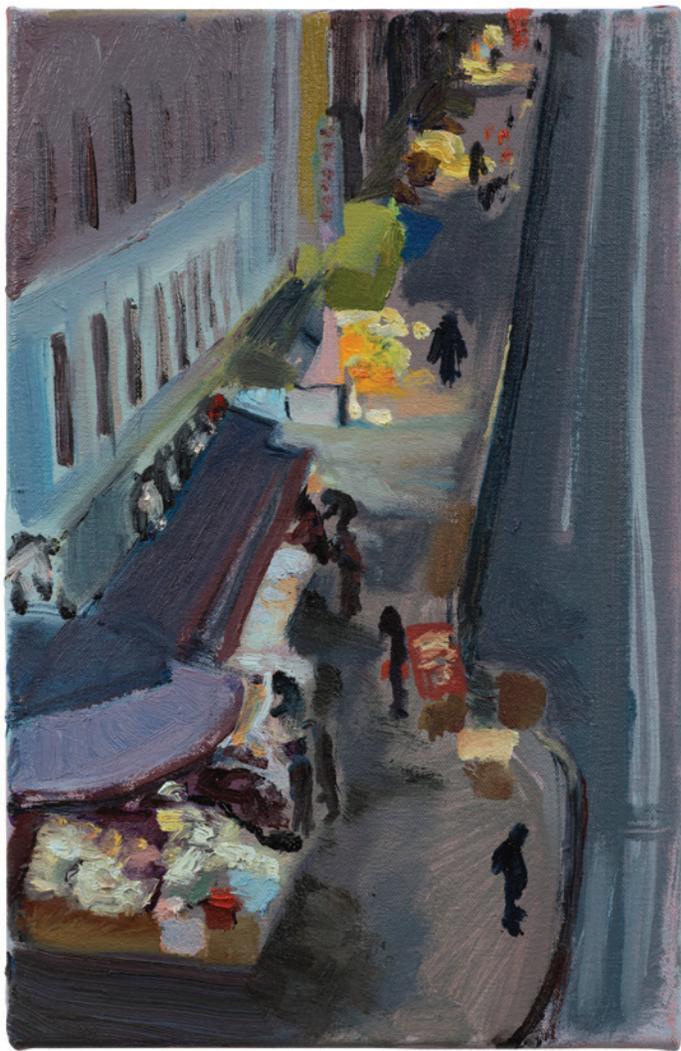








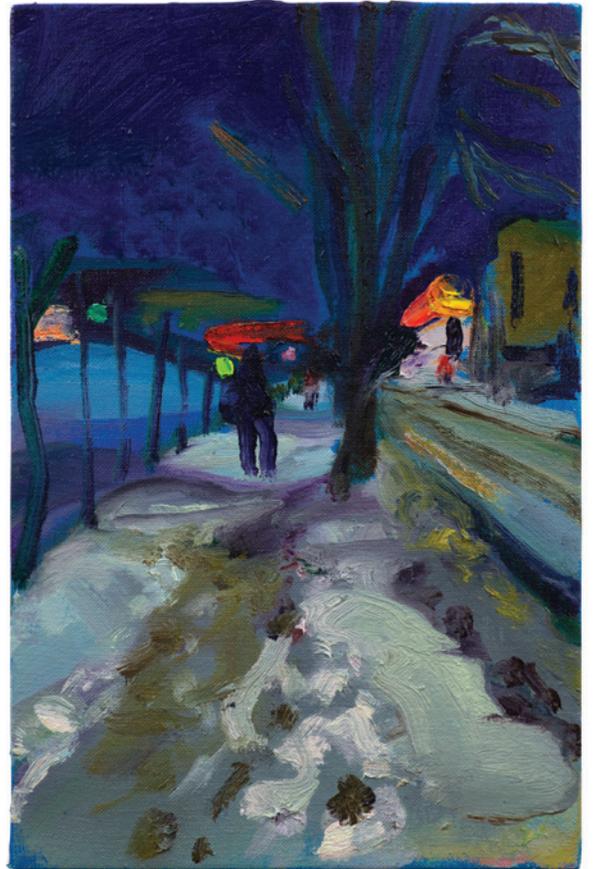
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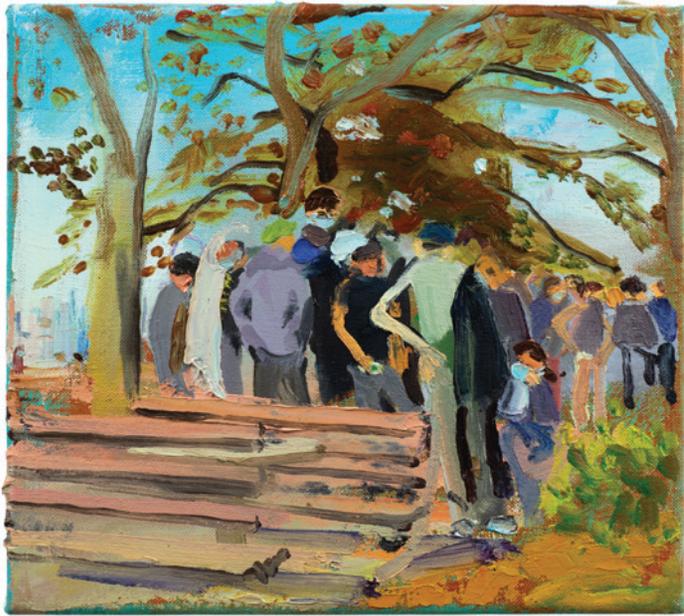


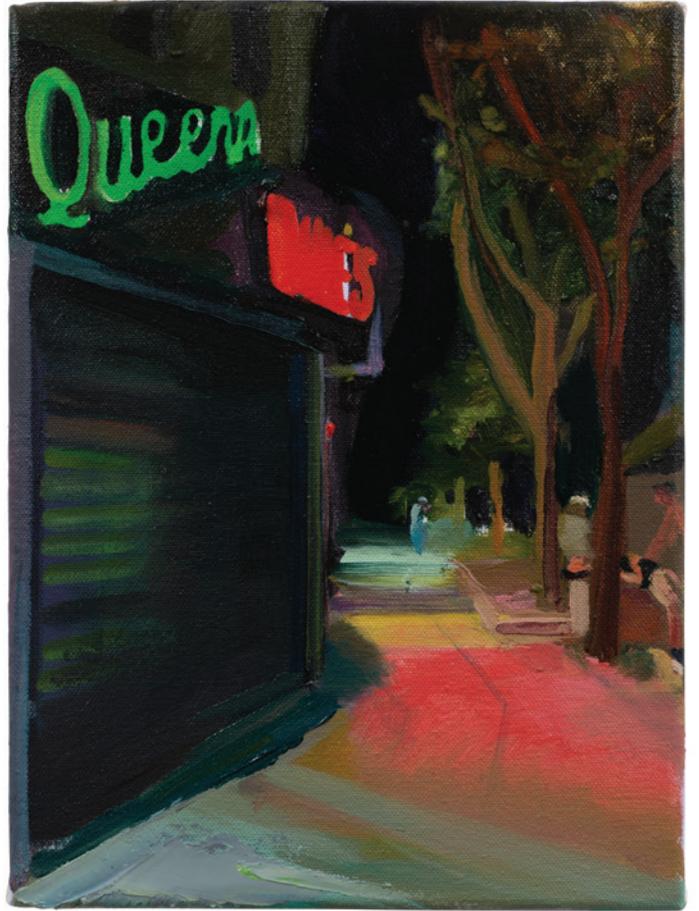
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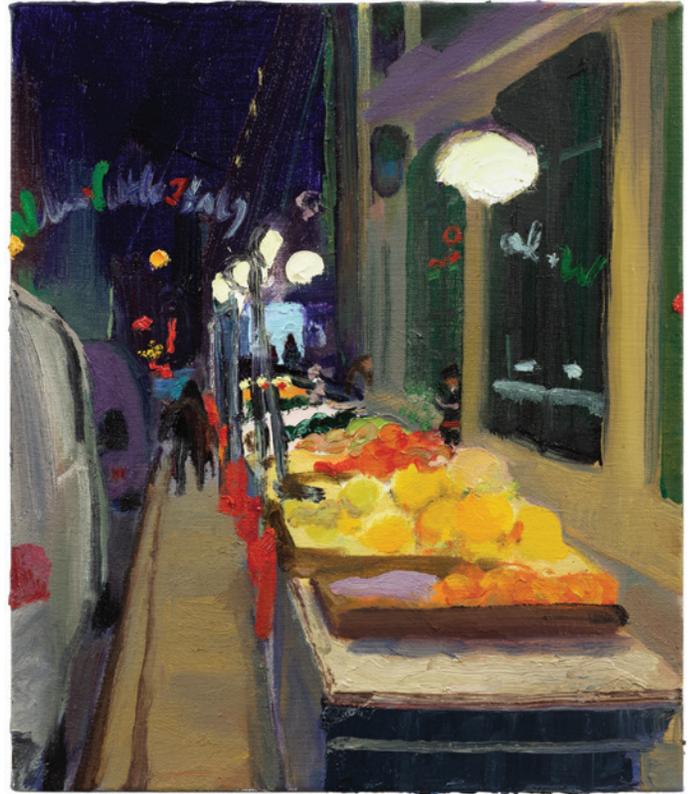


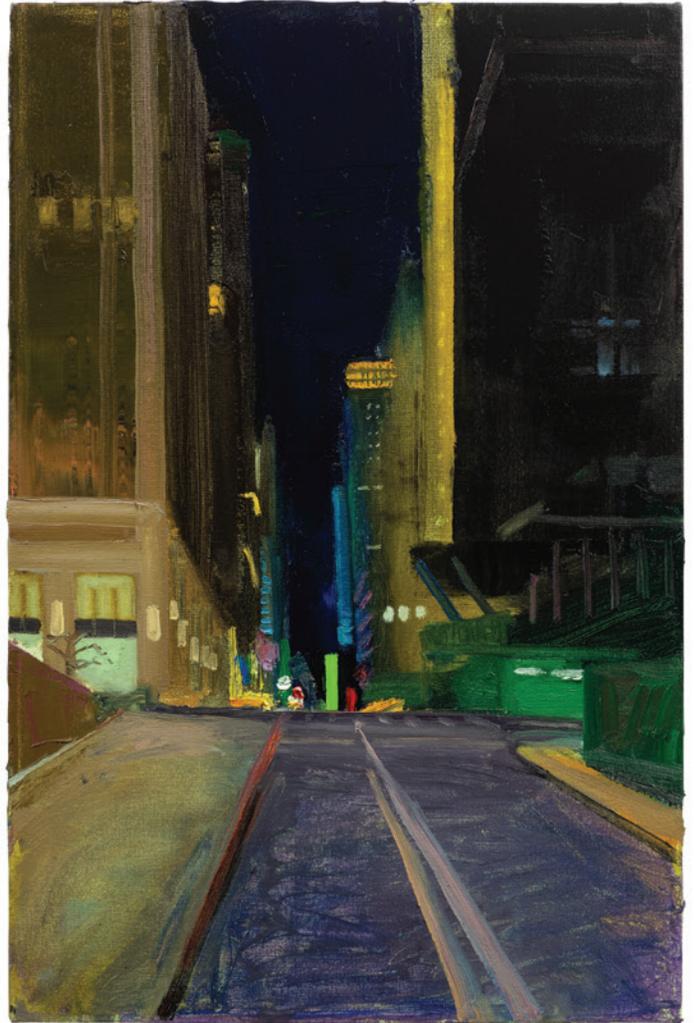
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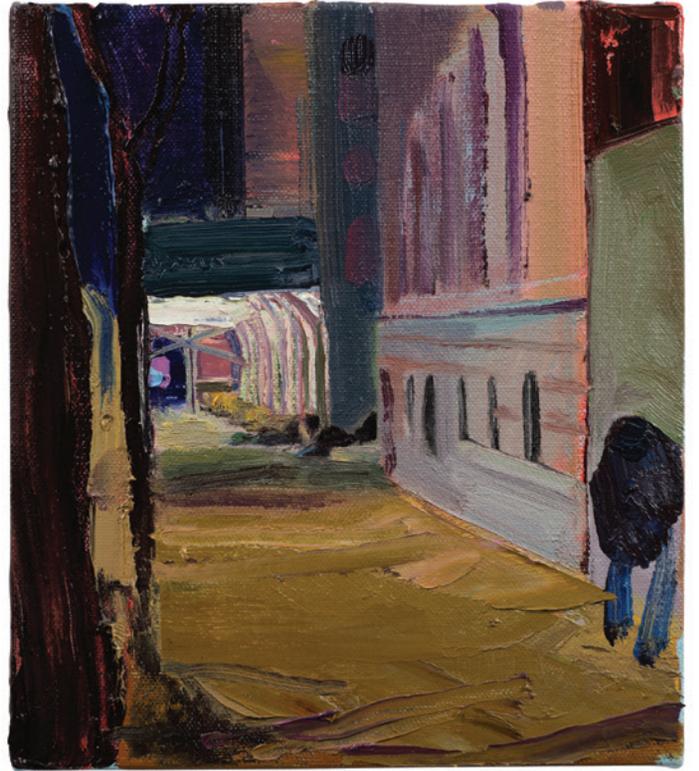




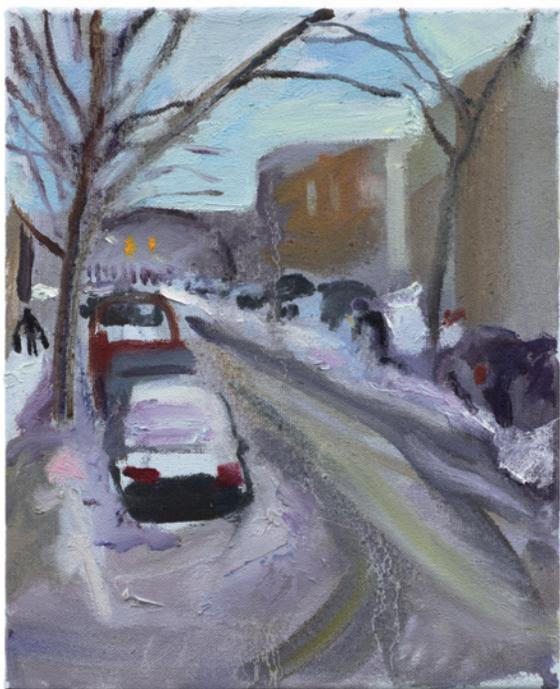




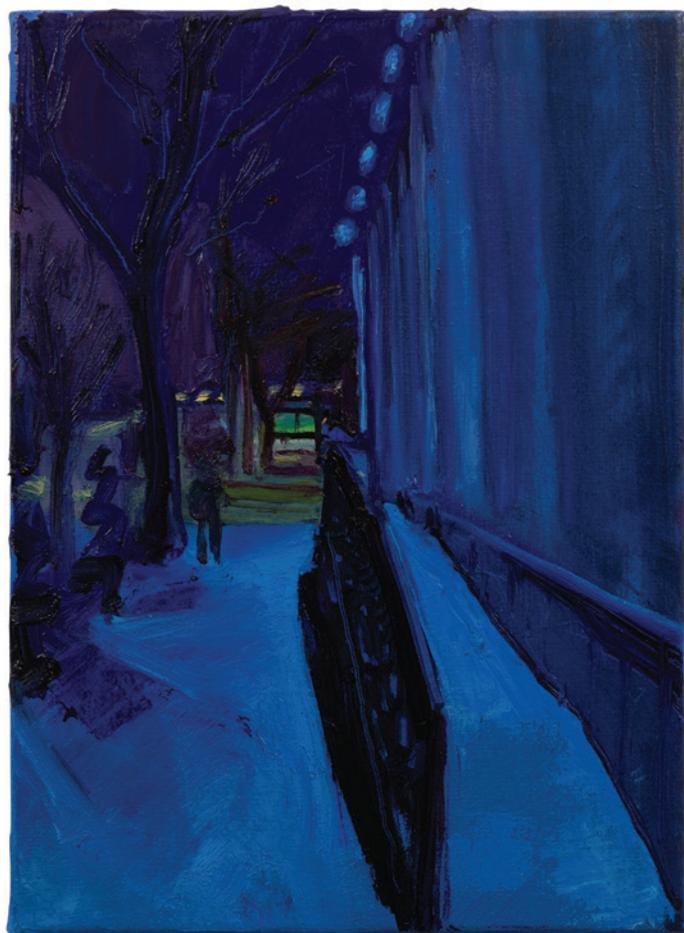




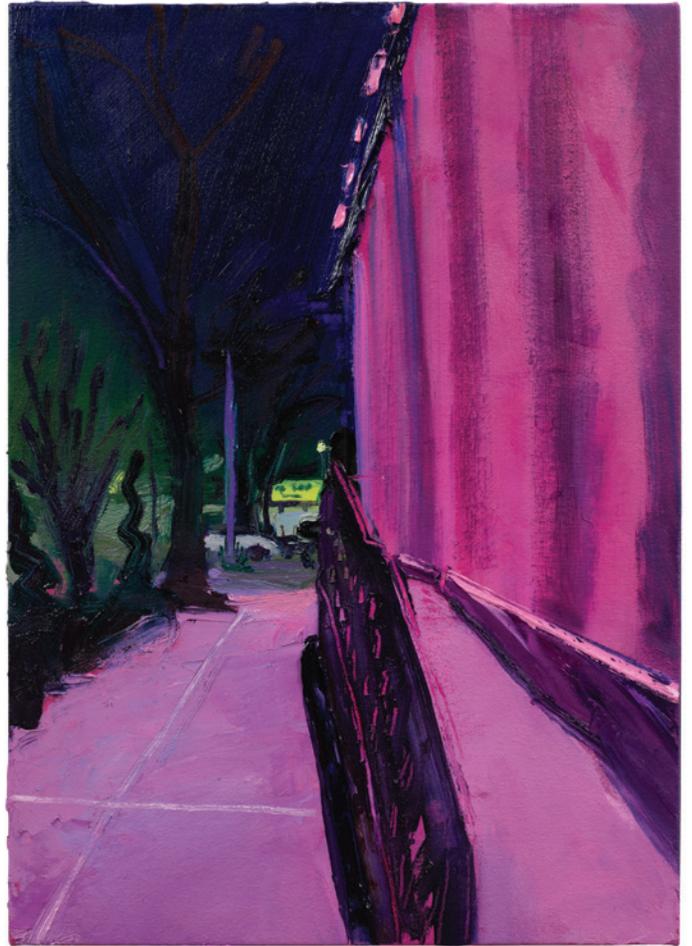




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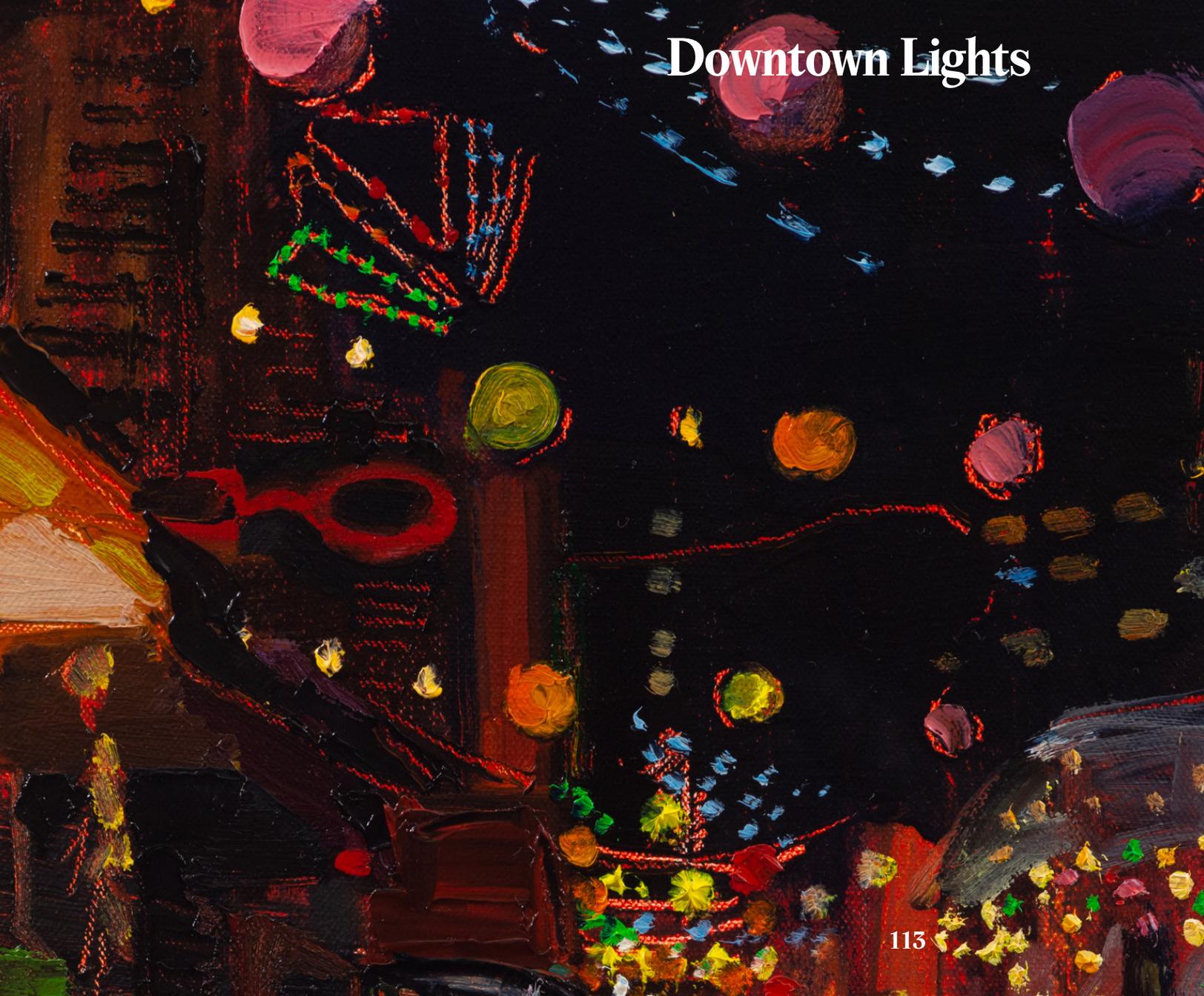
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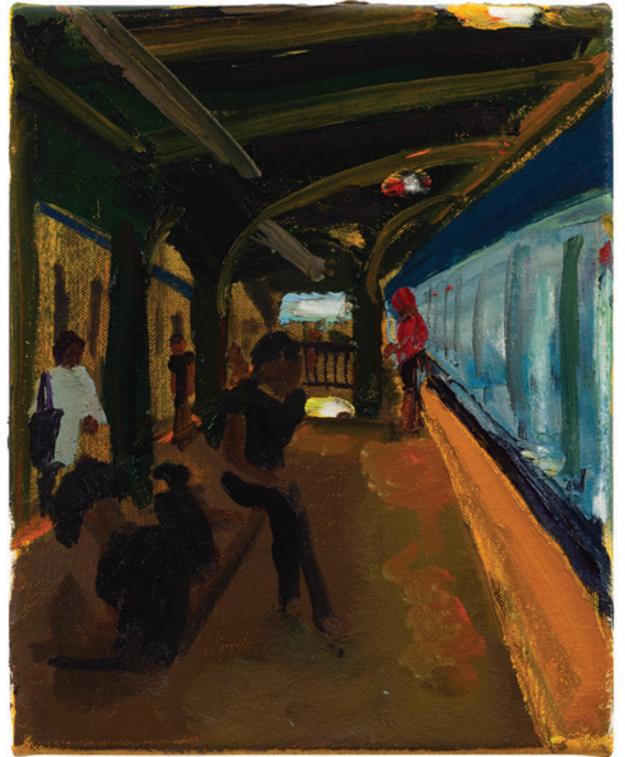
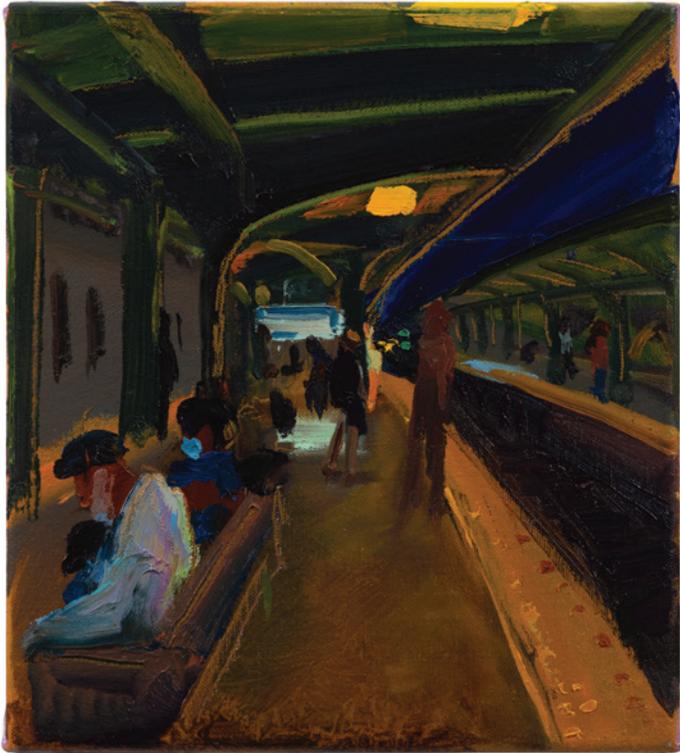


Downtown Lights

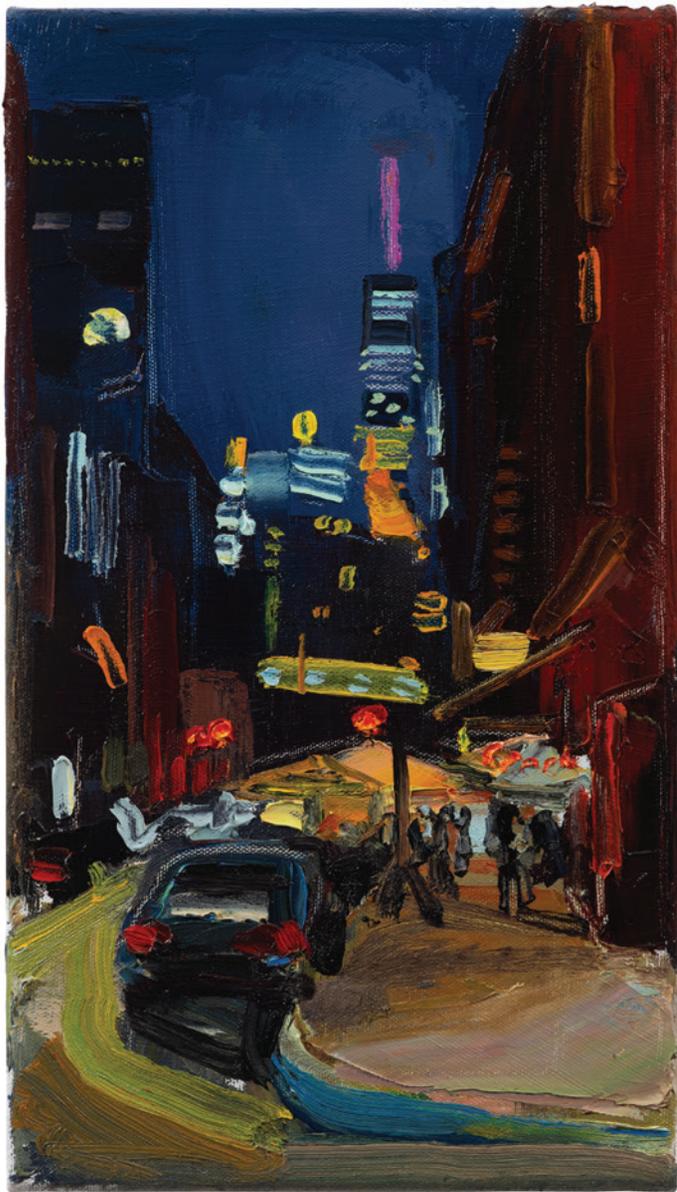


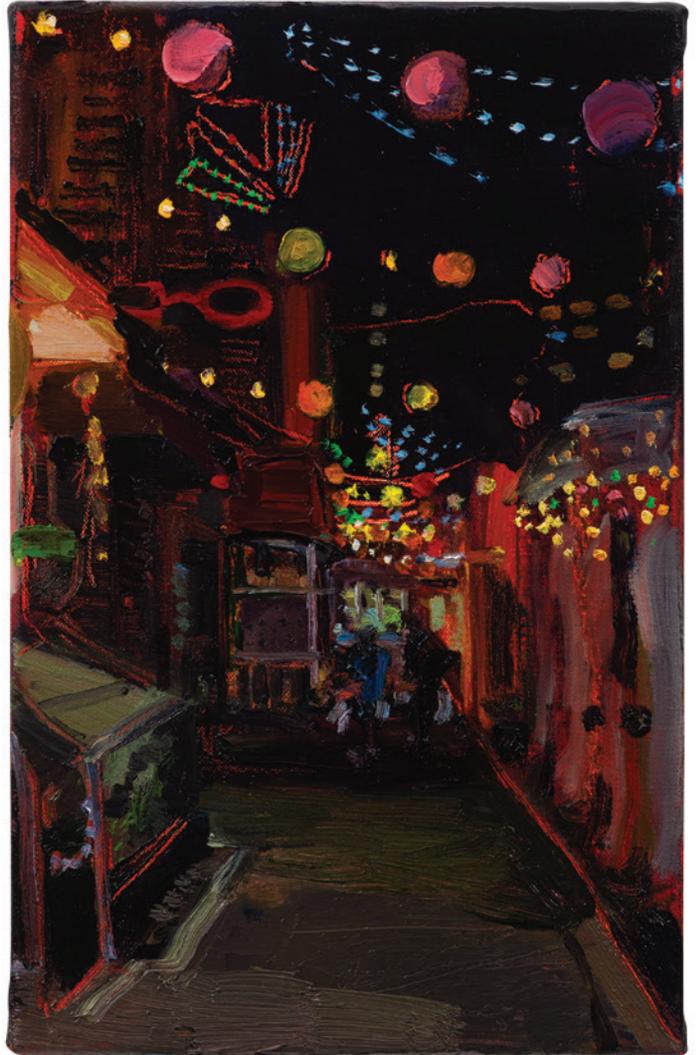














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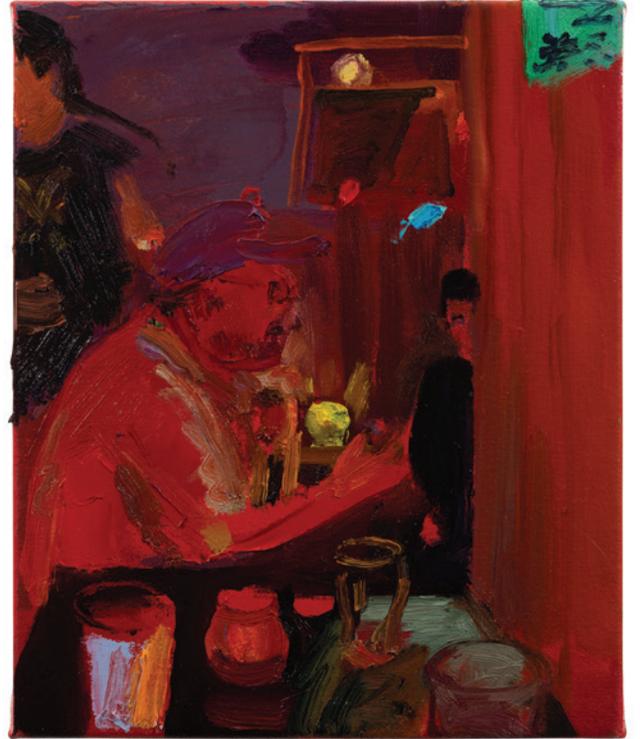


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List of Plates

- | | | | |
|---|---|----|---|
| 1 | Bar I, 2019
Oil on canvas
13 × 9 inches | 8 | Jackson at the Bar, 2020
Oil on canvas
12 × 15 inches |
| 2 | Bar IV, 2020
Oil on canvas
15 × 12 inches | 9 | Milo's, 2019
Oil on canvas
14 × 10 inches |
| 3 | Bar II, 2019
Oil on canvas
14 × 9 inches | 10 | Milo's II (Halloween Parade), 2019
Oil on canvas
12 × 9 inches |
| 4 | Bar III, 2020
Oil on canvas
15 × 10 inches | 11 | Bar V, 2020
Oil on canvas
15 × 8 inches |
| 5 | Last Call, 2020
Oil on canvas
17 × 13 inches | 12 | Night People, 2002
Oil on canvas
12 × 16 inches |
| 6 | Blue Monday, 2020
Oil on canvas
12 × 12 inches | 13 | Last Night, 2020
Oil on canvas
11 × 10 inches |
| 7 | Dan, 2020
Oil on canvas
11 × 9 inches | 14 | Pell Street, 2019
Oil on canvas
11 × 9 inches |

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|----|---|----|---|
| 15 | Mott, 2019
Oil on board
7 × 5 inches | 22 | Chinatown Tower,
2020
Oil on canvas
12 × 10 inches | 29 | Mott Street Market,
2020
Oil on canvas
10 × 14 inches | 36 | Park Players II,
2020
Oil on canvas
9 × 10 inches |
| 16 | Collectors I, 2019
Oil on canvas
11 × 8 inches | 23 | Pell Street Pegasus,
2020
Oil on canvas
10 × 14 inches | 30 | Glendale Border
(Twilight), 2020
Oil on canvas
14 × 8 inches | 37 | Weekend Gamblers,
2020
Oil on canvas
8 × 9 inches |
| 17 | Collectors II, 2019
Oil on canvas
11 × 9 inches | 24 | Ridgewood Roof,
2020
Oil on canvas
18 × 18 inches | 31 | East Broadway
(South), 2021
Oil on canvas
14 × 9 inches | 38 | Queens Wines, 2020
Oil on canvas
12 × 9 inches |
| 18 | Collectors IV, 2019
Oil on canvas
11 × 15 inches | 25 | Midtown I, 2020
Oil on canvas
24 × 11 inches | 32 | Chinatown, 2021
Oil on canvas
17 × 8 inches | 39 | Bag Seller, 2021
Oil on canvas
8 × 9 inches |
| 19 | Conversation, 2019
Oil on canvas
14 × 11 inches | 26 | Deli 2010, 2020
Oil on canvas
8 × 9 inches | 33 | Glendale Border,
2020
Oil on canvas
12 × 8 inches | 40 | Chinatown Border,
2020
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| 20 | Blue Triangle, 2019
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9 × 11 inches | 41 | Midtown
Construction, 2020
Oil on canvas
11 × 8 inches |
| 21 | Chinatown Optical,
2020
Oil on canvas
15 × 15 inches | 28 | Night Games, 2020
Oil on canvas
10 × 9 inches | 35 | Park Players III,
2020
Oil on canvas
8 × 8 inches | 42 | Midtown II, 2021
Oil on canvas
24 × 16 inches |

43 **Saint Bart's, 2020**
Oil on canvas
9 × 8 inches

44 **Mulberry Market, 2020**
Oil on canvas
13 × 11 inches

45 **Night Games II, 2020**
Oil on canvas
9 × 8 inches

46 **Myrtle Slush, 2020**
Oil on canvas
11 × 9 inches

47 **Elite Palace (Blue), 2020**
Oil on canvas
15 × 11 inches

48 **Mott Lanterns, 2020**
Oil on canvas
8 × 8 inches

49 **Elite Palace (Pink), 2020**
Oil on canvas
18 × 13 inches

50 **Little Italy, 2021**
Oil on canvas
4 × 4 inches

51 **Juniper Valley, 2021**
Oil on canvas
10 × 15 inches

52 **Myrtle-Broadway V, 2021**
Oil on canvas
8 × 6 inches

53 **Myrtle-Broadway I, 2021**
Oil on canvas
13 × 9 inches

54 **Myrtle-Broadway II, 2021**
Oil on canvas
10 × 9 inches

55 **Myrtle-Broadway III, 2021**
Oil on canvas
10 × 8 inches

56 **Myrtle-Broadway IV, 2021**
Oil on canvas
14 × 8 inches

57 **Saturday Night, 2021**
Oil on canvas
14 × 8 inches

58 **Downtown Lights, 2021**
Oil on canvas
14 × 9 inches

59 **Midtown Falafel, 2021**
Oil on canvas
9 × 9 inches

60 **Tudor City, 2021**
Oil on canvas
20 × 10 inches

61 **Fireworks, 2021**
Oil on canvas
13 × 15 inches

62 **Dark Park, 2021**
Oil on canvas
9 × 8 inches

63 **Park Pavilion, 2021**
Oil on canvas
10 × 8 inches

64 **Columbus Park II, 2021**
Oil on canvas
9 × 10 inches

65 **Floor Games, 2021**
Oil on canvas
8 × 8 inches

66 **Giglio Feast II, 2021**
Oil on canvas
5 × 7 inches

67 **Outdoor Bar II, 2021**
Oil on canvas
14 × 11 inches

68 **Dan and Logan, 2021**
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12 × 10 inches

69 **Sasha and Jackson, 2021**
Oil on canvas
8 × 8 inches

70 **Outdoor Bar I, 2021**
Oil on canvas
11 × 14 inches

- 71 Giglio Feast I, 2021**
Oil on canvas
11 × 11 inches
- 72 Street Fair I, 2021**
Oil on canvas
9 × 11 inches
- 73 Street Fair II, 2021**
Oil on canvas
8 × 10 inches
- 74 Crowd, 2021**
Oil on canvas
8 × 11 inches



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