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Emily Weiner's Superlative Surrealism

At New York's Miles McEnery Gallery, the Nashville-based painter draws on Magritte, Man Ray and more to transform the familiar into the unexpected.

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Installation view of 'Emily Weiner: Now Eve, We're Here, We've Won' at Miles McEnery Gallery.

Being a fan of visual art has little in common with being a fan of sports—when a favorite creator wins the Turner Prize there's no ticker-tape parade, and even the most bitter artistic rivalries seem downright amicable compared to the atmosphere when the Yankees take the field at Fenway. There is, however, a shared pleasure in watching the career of a particular talent blossom from potential-rich beginnings into the full bloom of professional success. I had the joy of watching Peyton Manning play at the University of Tennessee in the '90s, and eventually go on to win a Super Bowl. I've also had the joy of watching Emily Weiner emerge on the contemporary art scene and receive her first solo exhibition in New York, currently on view in Chelsea at Miles McEnery Gallery.

I first encountered Ms. Weiner's work back in 2022 and briefly wrote about it the following year when covering Future Fair, where the Nashville-based painter was showing with that city's Red Arrow gallery. At Miles McEnery, her work continues to push forward, growing in size, content and technique.

Ms. Weiner is part of the new Surrealist cohort that has revived the 20th-century style for new audiences, and her paintings borrow imagery from masters of the genre. The f-holes from Man Ray's *Violon d'Ingres* appear in her *Magician's Assistant* superimposed not on the back of Kiki de Montparnasse but on a white rabbit. Seen in profile, its eye at the center of the image pierces into us and offers a portal into Wonderland.

In *Emergence* the folds of curtains—a recurring subject in Ms. Weiner's work—mimic the peekaboo trick of Magritte's *Blank Signature*: Instead of a forest scene with a horse and rider sliced into illusive vertical sections, a full moon and night sky back a flock of geese that disappear and reappear in different sections of the drapery.

Emergence is one of several works that are roughly 5 feet tall, and Ms. Weiner proves that her painting retains all its impact at a greater scale. In *Ad Infinitum*, the faces of a Rubin vase, a classic optical illusion where two profiles form the outline of a chalice, are rotated on their side, duplicated and stacked one over the other. A glowing ember of a sun sits in the middle of the picture, and the overlapping faces, colored in a gradient that flows from the hues of pale dawn to midnight blue, lend the impression of ruffled tulle, light-dappled water and fog-kissed Appalachian Mountains.



Emergence, 2025, Oil on linen in painted wood frame, 50 1/4 x 36 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches.



Ad Infinitum, 2025, Oil on linen in painted wood frame, 61 1/2 x 46 1/2 x 2 inches.

Adding a new dimension, literally, to her work. Ms. Weiner has been experimenting with CNC milling to shape panels on which she paints. The undulating surface of *Double Slit* lends its night-scape curtain an especially billowy air, punctuated by the Lucio Fontana-style cuts of the title, but elsewhere the effect of this new technique is one of novelty and not deeper impact.

When it comes to materials, Ms. Weiner is most interesting when she augments her works with her handmade frames, which extend the surreal elements of her paintings into the real world. The coiled white subject of *Snake* has a mystical air about it, and seems to be casting a spell on us as the bronze-toned stoneware frame oozes around the work.

The violet gothic vaulting of *Passing Through* frames a figure eight, suggesting both infinity and an analemma tracing the annual path of the sun in the sky. The pair of hands in *Marionettist* make the benediction sign common in Christian iconography. And the triangular cutaway of *Excavation*, hosting a closely cropped portrait, mirrors the All Seeing Eye. Ms. Weiner is a master of imagery, repurposing but never appropriating her subjects. She makes the familiar excitingly new, invitingly mysterious and alluringly gnostic. Her success is well earned, and I'm excited to see what comes next.