

D'Souza, Aruna. "Nicole Eisenman." *4-Columns* (January 9, 2026) [ill.] [online]

4Columns

Visual Art

01.09.26

Nicole Eisenman

Aruna D'Souza

Art in a time of war: an exhibition of paintings, sculptures, drawings, and collages at 52 Walker.



Nicole Eisenman: STY, installation view. Courtesy 52 Walker.

Nicole Eisenman: STY, 52 Walker, curated by Ebony L. Haynes, 52 Walker Street, New York City, through January 10, 2026

A year ago, as the Trump administration was initiating its assault on immigrants, trans people, free speech, the rule of law, the Constitution, and a whole lot else besides, I was talking to a friend about how completely incapacitated I was, how unable to put a thought together, write a full sentence, or really function at all. “Remember, we’re living through a time of war,” he said. “It would be weird if you were able to go on like normal.” That simple statement of fact—that we are living through a time of war—was strangely freeing. It granted permission to not be okay. But it also raised the question of how to live under siege, especially when, if privileged enough, one’s everyday conditions look superficially the same as before.



Nicole Eisenman: *STY*, installation view. Courtesy 52 Walker. Pictured, far left: *The Bunker*, 2025.

Nicole Eisenman has clearly been pondering this conundrum, too, as demonstrated in *STY*, her current solo exhibition at 52 Walker. The show is installed in a built-out gallery within a gallery, its walls covered in Homasote board, commonly used to line artists' studios so pictures can be hung and rehung without damaging drywall. The beige panels, each a slightly different tone and textured like concrete, along with the wood floor, give the monochromatic space a bunker-like feel. Inside, five paintings, a handful of drawings and collages, and a trio of figurative sculptures offer thrilling insight into Eisenman's brain as she figures out what it means to be an artist operating in an industry that runs on dirty money and is thus inextricably linked to violence. This is not a new problem for Eisenman, who famously pulled out of the 2019 Whitney Biennial to protest the presence of Warren Kanders (a munitions dealer) on the museum's board, and who has been outspoken about the ways she's been punished by collectors and colleagues over her opposition to Israel's genocide. The pieces on view are from 2024 and 2025—some, that is, predate Trump's second inauguration, but the wartime vibe predates it, too.



Nicole Eisenman: *STY*, installation view. Courtesy 52 Walker. Pictured: *Fiddle V. Burns*, 2024.

Brain, studio, bunker. All of these come together in *The Bunker*, an oil painting that measures over eight feet square and is nestled in a frame made of painted cinder blocks and pink insulation board. Here we find, sitting in a cave, a cartoonish, mildly potbellied artist straight out of central casting—black turtleneck, beret, tiny cigarette held loosely in one comically oversized hand, holding out a thumb to check the scale of something on a canvas. The artist is so absorbed that they ignore the limpid blue sky beyond. This artist is not one of Plato’s cave-bound prisoners, fearfully trapped in the darkness, nor are they intrepidly seeking the light of truth outside. They are fully comfortable in their liminal position, content, focused on their task, heedless of the conditions in which they do it. (It feels ridiculous to invoke Greek philosophy in relation to this painting, which, in its style, seems extremely unserious, but that is often the case with Eisenman’s work—the collision of opposites.) Likewise, the painter in *Fiddle V. Burns* is trapped, or perhaps ensconced, this time in a hole in the ground, toiling away while wheels—black, abstracted discs running across toothy tracks—roll ominously overhead. The invocation of Holocaust trains is unmistakable. In the face of this, the title suggests, the painter has to decide his role: Is he going to emulate Nero, blithely going about his cultural activities while society collapses around him, playing the revolutionary, or will he, on the contrary, be an actual revolutionary and burn it all down?



Nicole Eisenman: *STY*, installation view. Courtesy 52 Walker. Pictured, left: *The Auction*, 2025.

With *The Auction* and *Archangel (The Visitors)*, questions of philosophy and ethics become entangled with materialist concerns. In the former, which is grand in scale at around nine by eleven feet, two art handlers hold up a painting—landscape-y, abstract-y, with gloopy lumps of pigment adhering to the surface—that a clutch of buyers is bidding on. Only one attendee actually bothers to look at the object being sold. The auctioneer is dressed in judicial robes, and behind him appears an electronic board displaying up-to-the-minute currency prices; the painter, depicted in a jaunty Cubist fashion, looks nervous as he grasps another canvas in his hand. It is as if Eisenman were laying bare all that goes studiously unmentioned at places like Sotheby's and Christie's: the way judgments of aesthetic and monetary values become blurred in the marketplace, the way collectors are often indifferent to the works they're buying, the way artists are reduced to a signature style (note how the artist's hand is rendered in the manner of the painting he's holding, rather than that of the rest of his body). Eisenman's proclivity for juxtaposing many different styles on a single canvas—a little AbEx, a bunch of Neue Sachlichkeit, some Futurism and Precious Moments for good measure—here reads as a reflection of the radical contradictions and disjunctions of life under whatever this stage of capitalism is (apocalyptic capitalism?). We are living in a moment that feels fully and completely bonkers—what use is (stylistic) logic in the face of it?



Nicole Eisenman: *STY*, installation view. Courtesy 52 Walker. Pictured, left: *Archangel (The Visitors)*, 2024. Right: *The Bunker*, 2025.

And then there is *Archangel (The Visitors)*, an image of an art opening in which figures (some based on Eisenman's own circle of friends and kin) mill and converse around sculptures on pedestals. A crusty balding art critic or collector rubs his hands together like a movie villain as he peers at a work, oblivious to the artist—Eisenman herself, presumably—picking his pocket. In the very back, a man in a trench coat enters the room flanked by two companions—a quotation of a historical photograph of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's chief propagandist, entering the 1938 Degenerate Art Exhibition in Berlin. From the ceiling hangs a massive pig dressed in a German military uniform—another quotation, this time of *Prussian Archangel*, a papier-mâché effigy that appeared at the First International Dada Art Fair in 1920, also in Berlin. These specters—of fascism, and of artistic anti-fascism—haunt the opening, but the guests don't seem to notice. It's business as usual at the gallery.



Nicole Eisenman: *STY*, installation view. Courtesy 52 Walker. Pictured, left foreground, center background, and far right: *There I Was*, 2025.

At the center of Eisenman's installation is a trio of three larger than life-size sculptures made in scagliola—a form of trompe l'oeil plasterwork that the Medici family was especially fond of in the Italian Renaissance—their marble-like veining echoing the violent brushwork of the artworks depicted in *Archangel (The Visitors)*. Two of them look like automatons, aliens, dress dummies, or those little wooden articulated figures artists keep in their studio; the third resembles a slightly more humanoid Teletubby. Each holds a flat-screen: one balances it on its head, another hoists it under its arm, and the third holds it outstretched, head tilted down as if watching intently. They play videos cut together from iPhone footage, sci-fi and horror movies, and AI-generated imagery. I think of these sculptures as yet more iterations of “the artist” in this show, by turns enraptured by and uninterested in the world in their hands—oblivious to the wonders and horrors unfolding on the screens, or so invested in them that they forget to look at anything else.

These proxy artists, like all the others represented here, appear to be the ones who refuse to leave the not-exactly-blissful, but at least unchallenging, ignorance of the cave—or the bunker, or the studio. They are one and the same in the end. Eisenman's offering is not a lesson in how to live in a time of war so much as an offering of negative examples, a fierce and canny and witty articulation of the dangers of remaining complacent, bellies and pockets full, while fascism rolls right over us.

Aruna D'Souza is a writer and critic based in New York. She contributes to the New York Times, 4Columns, and Hyperallergic. Her new book, Imperfect Solidarities, was published by Floating Opera Press in 2024.

Diehl, Travis. "Nicole Eisenman's "STY"." *e-flux* (January 9, 2026) [ill.] [online]

e-flux

Nicole Eisenman's "STY"

Travis Diehl



Nicole Eisenman, *Fiddle V. Burns*, 2024. Oil on canvas, 208.3 × 165.4 cm. Image courtesy of 52 Walker, New York.

January 9, 2026

52 Walker, New York

October 30, 2025–January 10, 2026



View of Nicole Eisenman's "STY" at 52 Walker, New York, 2025–26. (Wall) *The Auction*, 2025. Oil on canvas and linen, 266.7 × 348 cm. (Floor) *There I Was*, 2025. Scagliola, video, rock, overall dimensions variable. Image courtesy of 52 Walker.

Nicole Eisenman's delirious turn at 52 Walker is titled "STY," as in where pigs are kept. The artist's new paintings and sculptures wallow in discomfort. The walls are padded with hairy taupe acoustic panels, giving the show a sense of isolation, like a crate or a studio or the titular pen, a dingier cube. Few artists today match Eisenman's wild brand of topical expressionism, their way of addressing current events *and* the niche moves of painting as a discipline. The theme here is—what else?—the absurd necessity of art in times of crisis.

Eisenman makes history paintings of the present, wily canvases packed with painterly in-jokes and political invective. For "STY," they convey an aura of Weimar-style abandon haunted by impending fascism. In *Archangel (The Visitors)* (2024), museum patrons mill around a forest of wiggly statues, apparently oblivious to the cartoonish hog in an Imperial German officer's uniform looming over them like an evil parade float—a visitation from John Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter's *Prussian Archangel* sculpture, which was mounted on the ceiling of the 1920 Dada Fair in Berlin. The patrons include Joseph Goebbels (from a photo op at the "Entartete Kunst" exhibition in 1937), a pickpocket in the foreground resembling Eisenman, and others drawn from different stylistic folds of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each figure is as nearsighted as the next, absorbed in what's in front of them. Or maybe they're just tired.



View of Nicole Eisenman's "STY" at 52 Walker, New York, 2025–26. (Left) *Archangel (The Visitors)*, 2024. Oil on linen, 325.4 × 266.7 cm. (Right) *The Bunker*, 2025. Oil on canvas in artist's frame, 254 × 254 × 5.1 cm. Image courtesy of 52 Walker.

In a sense, to point out the Fascists in our midst is both too little and too much. It's a symbol of liberal impotence that the F-word has lost its punch through the double imprecisions of overuse and reluctance, and anyway can't always capture the bespoke authoritarianism of the moment. There are still lowercase fascists, though—or, to be precise, self-avowed neo-Nazis, white supremacists, white nationalists, neoreactionaries, monarchists, promoters of the unitary executive theory... So, Eisenman employs a little dramatic irony. *We* see the swine in proto-Gestapo gear. Or, do we? The painter put him there, an art-historical specter.

The willful blindness of the intelligentsia is a trope, but so is their self-satisfaction. *Fiddle V. Burns* (2024), punningly titled, is a cutaway view of a battlefield trench as a tank drives over it, while a painter at their canvas studies the treads. Other paintings in the show are more pyrotechnic, but this one—an unappealing upside-down rainbow of brown, ugly on purpose, the painterly equivalent of pig wrestling—is the most coy: the bottom-left corner of the canvas is left exposed, like a curtsy. Easy to mock the painter for fiddling while the world burns, except Eisenman is that painter, trapped in their own virtuosity, self-satirizing.



View of Nicole Eisenman's "STY" at 52 Walker, New York, 2025–26. Image courtesy of 52 Walker.

"STY" is sympathetic even when it's arch. Standing around the gallery as if milling with the crowd are three vague, towering *Übermenschen* or Italo-fascist idols, humanoids made from a swirling plaster composite that can imitate marble but is here pigmented with the colors of broken LED screens (*There I Was*, 2025). Each statue totes a TV, carrying it like something else—a phone, a painting?—and the surfaces crackle with smartphone footage, making them nightmarish allegories for the outsized weight of digital "feeds."

The cultural elite have porcine tendencies too, gluttoned on images, irritated by their powers of observation, and so on. If only clear eyes could prevent the pending slaughter. What separates Eisenman's wit from cringy anti-Trump propaganda is its explicit self-innervation. The artist is embedded in their subject, they record their scene. One of Eisenman's most revealing paintings (not on view) is *The Abolitionists in the Park* (2020–22), a harlequin tableau of young people clustered in a New York park, around the time of the pandemic or Black Lives Matter uprisings. Critics Tobi Haslett and Hannah Black sit in the center. It's a painting of people seeing themselves living through history. "STY" likewise conveys the bitter flex of being tugged along by the flow of events but also feeling your strength.

Still, any smart artist will be circumspect about art's power. Eisenman's paintings won't stop any tanks or change any minds, but they're not trying to. Instead, they revel in a more resigned role: something for like minds to rally around. Those like minds may yet be born, and future historians may see work like Eisenman's as proof that there were skeptics and subversives in these dark times, free in soul if not body.



Nicole Eisenman, *The Abolitionists in the Park*, 2020–22. Oil on canvas, 325.8 x 267 cm. Collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Nicole Eisenman. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich. Photo by Thomas Barratt.



Nicole Eisenman, *Feast Your Eyes, Gloat Your Soul*, 2025. Oil and collage on paper, 45.4 x 60.6 cm. © Nicole Eisenman. Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker, New York

Saltz, Jerry. "The Crazy Cataclysms of Nicole Eisenman." *New York Magazine: Vulture* (December 25, 2025) [ill.] [online]

VULTURE

ART REVIEW

The Crazy Cataclysms of Nicole Eisenman

By Jerry Saltz, *New York's senior art critic*

DEC. 25, 2025

"STY" at David Zwirner, 52 Walker Street, through January 10.

SAVE

2 COMMENTS



Photo: Courtesy 52 Walker, New York

Nicole Eisenman's work is a combination of social realism, twisted art history, guided-missile observations about the art world, and comic-book illustration. Her triumph at the 1995 Whitney Biennial, *Self-Portrait With Exploded Whitney*, was a huge wall mural of the museum swamped by wreckage. Eisenman saw the future. Indeed, 20 years later, she won a MacArthur "genius" grant.

I was an adviser for that Biennial, assisting the late aesthete Klaus Kertess, who was hired to create an apolitical reply to the previous edition in 1993. I hated this show. I got only two artists included: Rirkrit Tiravanija and Eisenman. I still remember our visit to Eisenman's studio far out on East 8th Street. The place was a cluttered mess of rags, clothes, cigarette butts, and paint cans.

Eisenman has said she started out in a "degenerate and proto-queer" environment, asserting that, when she arrived in New York in the late 1980s, there "was no such thing as queer yet." The artist wasn't interested in modernism's pieties. She was after drama. Her influences include Caravaggio, Giotto, Michelangelo, Grant Wood, Georg Baselitz, and WPA murals, all mixed into clusterfucks of seriousness and stupidity, tenderness and the grotesquerie. Her *Alice in Wonderland* depicts a tiny Alice whose head is jammed into the vagina of Wonder Woman. She's created scenes of castration and Betty Rubble and Wilma Flintstone in flagrante ecstasy. Artist Amy Sillman wrote that Eisenman renders figures "with riotous unpredictability, anti-Puritanically taking delight in misbehavior on every level." Eisenman takes the sacred and drags it across the barroom floor.

Her paintings at 52 Walker are delirious indictments of politics, art, and money. The show is brilliantly installed on tinted Homasote walls that exude warmth and knit together the entire space. Drawings and collages are pushpinned to the walls. Videos play on three giant flat-screens, each held up by a larger-than-life-size figurative sculpture. They're modern golems. The overall effect makes one feel like an alien on another planet bearing witness to the strange behaviors of its inhabitants.

Archangel (The Visitors) gives us a room of familiar art-world types lounging, conversing, staring. Maybe it's a party or an auction. In the lower left corner, two friends commune. On the right, Eisenman, in a sly self-portrait as a thief, plucks a wallet from a collector lost in thought. There are abstract sculptures installed around the space. Over the scene hovers the "Prussian Archangel," a reference to the pig in military uniform that was featured at the 1920 International Dada Fair in Berlin. A Nazi-like figure slinks in the back. The result is a striking, absurd fresco about complicity and the borders between radical art and repression.

In *The Auction*, Eisenman stages a tribunal. A magistrate in black robes presides as a tote board flashes auction bids in the millions. Onlookers stare; an artist lugs a painting into the spectacle; an assistant unveils another. It's a real "J'accuse!" — part carnival cruise, part corporate horror show. Eisenman sneers and mourns at once.

Then there's *Fiddle V. Burns*, a searing quasi-self-portrait. A lone figure paints a single unseen red stroke while a tank rumbles overhead. The studio becomes bunker, sanctuary, and dream palace — painting as survival.

I need to turn back the clock here. In 1993, I first saw Eisenman's work at Trial Balloon, a raw Soho loft-gallery on Broadway. It was operated by two women, artists Nicola Tyson and Angela Lyras. At the time, the art world was without funds. The 1980s money machine was up in smoke, and megagalleries were in the distant future. Everything was up in the air, out of sorts, homemade; it felt like everyone was starting over, looking for ways to exhibit and maybe sell work. Eisenman showed *Minotaur Hunt* and *Penelope in the Pit*. She portrayed a world of naked women killing men and an all-female pit crew servicing a pink race car. It was spectacular — and feels particularly resonant in this moment.

"There are no rules," Eisenman has said. Whether this statement is meant to be celebratory or cautionary is unclear. Her most recent work feels like a cataclysmic staging of an artist alone in her studio while systems collapse and the country cracks up. Her art is both a private vision and an evocation of a public disaster.

Vinler, John. “The Year in Art Criticism: 5 Exhilarating Pieces You Need to Read Before 2026.” *Cultured Magazine* (December 23, 2025) [ill.] [online]

CULTURED

The Year in Art Criticism: 5 Exhilarating Pieces You Need to Read Before 2026

As the Critics' Table and the gallery world breaks for the holiday, we look back on a selection of notable pieces published from 2025.

WORDS

Cultured Magazine

December 23, 2025



A post from Maxwell Graham Gallery documents the removal of *Replacement*, 2025, by Cameron Rowland from the exterior of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (via Instagram screenshot).



Installation view of Nicole Eisenman's "STY," 2025. Image courtesy of 52 Walker, New York.

John Vincler on Nicole Eisenman at 52 Walker

In a tighter, less sprawling presentation of work at 52 Walker in Tribeca, Nicole Eisenman similarly showed politically charged work: "Eisenman's entire show is like an interactive stage set for contemplating the possibilities and limitations of art's ability to address the crisis of the present. It dares to juxtapose our contemporary moment with prior historical eras, when authoritarianism, censorship, and fascism were on the rise."

Wetzler, Rachel. "The Year of Demented Painting." *Artforum* (December 22, 2025) [ill.] [online]

ARTFORUM

FIELD NOTES

THE YEAR OF DEMENTED PAINTING

Surveying the final round of 2025 shows in New York

By Rachel Wetzler ☒

December 22, 2025 8:46 am



Jana Euler, *More Morecorns*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 71 × 118 1/4". Photo: Júlia Standovár.

IF NOTHING ELSE, 2025 was a good year for demented painting. This might have been obvious to anyone who saw Laura Owens's maximalist fantasia at Matthew Marks in Chelsea this past spring—the single best gallery show I saw all year. The works on view deployed all manner of painterly illusion, trick, and gag. Giant canvases hung in the main space, their collage-like compositions built up from dense aggregates of silk-screened layers (over a hundred in some cases). These were set against artist-made wallpaper, with a trompe l'oeil border of pretzels, donuts, and assorted other confections dangling from electrical cords whose dainty loops were modeled after trailing vines. Hidden behind a false door was a wraparound installation of paintings on aluminum panel configured as a mural, featuring a grab bag of floriated patterns jostling and colliding, with miniature canvases intermittently popping out of trapdoors like cuckoo clocks. Throughout this madcap ensemble, Owens made liberal use of flatly painted drop shadows that introduced a confounding fictive depth, alongside exaggerated instances of real depth—fluffy pastel dollops and smears of paint with the consistency of buttercream projecting off the surface. At room-size scale, the combination was as destabilizing as it was ridiculous.

The maker of demented paintings approaches the medium in a spirit of both mischievousness and self-evident enthusiasm: Look at all the crazy shit you can do with pigment on a planar surface! Think, for instance, of the ghoulish revisions of old-master nudes in Ambra Wellmann's blockbuster fall season opener at Company and Hauser & Wirth, Orion Martin's freaky riffs on stained glass at Derosia this summer, Frieda Toranzo Jaeger's quasi-ecclesiastical depictions of toolboxes at Bortolami in the spring, Jeremy Glogan's warped renderings of boozy snapshots at Jenny's, or Emily Sundblad's dainty dreamscapes at Bortolami (again), jarring combinations of appropriated imagery floating in a romantic haze. What makes these paintings demented isn't a matter of style so much as attitude: an indifference to pictorial coherence, a disregard for the rules of composition and good taste, an interest in bringing things together that would seem to belong to different painterly universes. This is the idiom of a demented present: all bets are off.



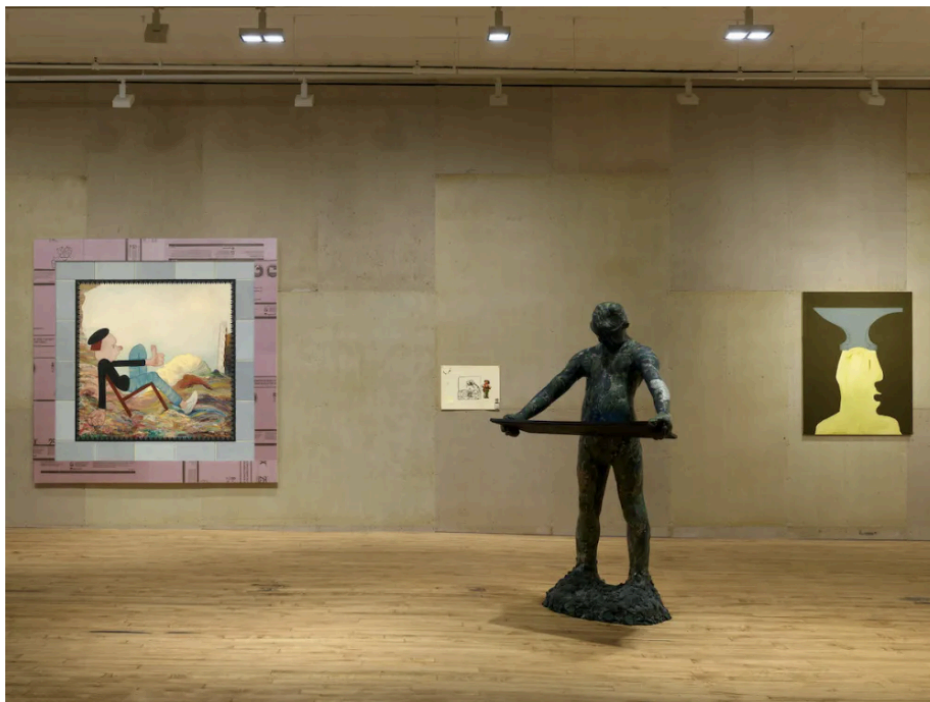
View of "Jana Euler: The center does not fold" at Greene Naftali, New York, 2025. Photo: Júlia Standovár.

The last round of 2025 shows in New York brought this year of painterly hijinks to a fittingly manic close. On the ground floor of Greene Naftali, for example, Jana Euler presents a characteristically baffling array of subjects depicted in an equally eclectic range of stylistic registers: On one end of the spectrum, a Photorealist transcription of a beige electrical socket; on the other, a pair of the multi-horned mythical creatures she calls "morecorns" humping in a desert landscape with a storybook pastel sky. Somewhere in the middle is the new series "Unfolded Dollar," 2025, a group of five progressively larger rectangular paintings riffing on the form of a single wrinkled dollar bill. *Unfolded Dollar 2* and *Untitled Dollar 4* are both airbrushed freehand, the former with an impressive accuracy, the latter blurred as if photographed out of focus. *Untitled Dollar 1*, painted in oil, dispenses with the bill's recognizable motifs altogether, instead filling the creased borders of the picture with the intricate swirling guilloche patterns and arabesques used to deter counterfeiters. Identifying the canvas with currency is a nod to the works' inevitable commoditization as soon as they leave the studio for the gallery wall, but the dollar paintings are, above all, a formal challenge: to paint this overdetermined image-object in such a way that it is perceived first and foremost as an arrangement of painted marks and only secondarily as a picture of something. (Part of what makes these paintings feel so insane is the sincerity with which this obviously futile mission is pursued.)



Monika Baer, *Schweine Steine Scherben (skinning)*, 2025, oil, acrylic, pigments, and sand on canvas, 82 5/8 × 63 inches. Photo: Gina Folly.

Upstairs at Greene Naftali, Monika Baer pursues a more elusive confrontation between dissonant painterly treatments of the same deadpan subject. The show, titled “Schweine Steine Scherben” (Pigs Stones Shards), features a series of large vertical canvases with grounds of precisely rendered brickwork over which she has layered thick stucco-like fields of lavender or pale pink, textured with sand and incised with crude graffiti in the manner of Jean Dubuffet’s *hautes pâtes*. In three other works each titled *Lavender Wall*, 2025, the stucco has overtaken the canvas entirely. Here, Baer poses a riddle: Does a painting of a wall belong to the tradition of the abstract monochrome or the lineage of the mimetic?



View of "Nicole Eisenman: STY" at 52 Walker, New York, 2025. Photo: Chase Barnes.

In her show "STY" at 52 Walker, meanwhile, Nicole Eisenman serves up a disjunctive collision of styles and moods that takes up the pressures—ethical, psychic, material—of making art during the ascendancy of the authoritarian right. But if the theme is sober, the affect is antic: Five acerbic canvases channeling Otto Dix and George Grosz hang atop walls of studio-ready Homasote wallboard, interspersed among casually pinned preparatory sketches and coffee-stained printouts, while a trio of vaguely classicized nude sculptures stand nearby, each one propping up a flat-screen monitor that plays a cacophonous montage of video clips. Several paintings depict the solitary artist, who seems at once dedicated to her craft and delusionally self-absorbed. *The Bunker*, 2024, for instance, imagines the painter as a postapocalyptic wastrel, a cartoon figure with a cigarette and black beret lounging in a chair amid a morass of thick painterly sludge, offering a double-edged thumbs-up to a propped-up canvas; the painting is encased in an artist-made frame of Pink Panther-brand insulation board and faux cement blocks.

Other Eisenman works turn to art's disordered public reception. In *The Auction*, 2025, a black-robed auctioneer in the guise of a judge presides over the curiously *plein air* sale of an abstract canvas with thick impasto daubs trailing across a white ground, a currency conversion board hovering against the moody landscape behind him. Eisenman populates the crowd of this already idiosyncratic scene with bidders and observers rendered in the full gamut of modern figural modes: *sachlich*, Rockwellian, post-Cubist, Gustonesque. Just off center, a pallid man in a brownish shirt thrusts his arm up to bid a "Sieg Heil," a gesture echoed by a blobby figure standing in front of a faux-bois parapet whose outsize orange fingers are coiled into what I couldn't help but see as the buffoonish silhouette of Donald Trump's face in profile. Taken together, Eisenman's works offer a soot-tinted window into the inner world of a painter navigating the miasma of despair, outrage, disavowal, sublimation, and indecision that is today's artistic-intellectual Weltanschauung.



Jeff Koons, *The Golden Age*, 2018–25, oil on canvas with aluminum leaf, 84 × 127". Photo: Maris Hutchinson

Jeff Koons's newish "Porcelain Series," the subject of his first New York show in seven years, at Gagosian in Chelsea, betrays no such anxiety: It is utter nonsense. Embedded within these works, Koons writes in the press release, is "the belief in humanity and civilization through our possibility to transcend." Each of the show's seven hulking paintings begins with a nature scenereproduced in a blinding Technicolor palette—a verdant forest in *The Golden Age*, a cresting wave in *Nymph, Pluto, and Satyr*, both somehow produced from 2018 to 2025—overlaid with a shimmery stenciled lattice of aluminum leaf drawn from sixteenth-century engravings of mythological figures. Placed atop and between these representational layers are Owens-y globs and streaks of muddied color, which Koons avows were applied by his hand alone (he's posted Instagram videos to prove it). These are object lessons in the distinction between a demented painting and a merely dreadful one: If they employ all the right ingredients, they lack the most important one, which is, it turns out, the ability to paint.



Jeff Koons, *Kissing Lovers*, 2016–25, mirror-polished stainless steel with transparent color coating, 88 × 77 × 55". Photo: Maris Hutchinson.

The show's seven sculptures, on the other hand, are delightfully unhinged. Modeled after porcelain figurines from storied European manufacturers like Meissen and Staffordshire, which Koons evidently collects, the sculptures transform miniature clusters of classical goddesses, Rococo couples, and wild animals stalking prey into larger-than-life mirror-polished steel forms; these are decorated with transparent polychrome coatings that approximate areas of handpainted glaze. The sculptures follow a familiar Koons formula of blowing up a small kitsch object to epic scale, but unlike his mirrored balloon animals, diamonds, Easter eggs, and piles of Play-Doh, the source objects here have already undergone their own shift in scale, replicating neoclassical statuary in miniature. The result is an astonishing level of distortion, an effect amplified by the gleaming mirrored surfaces, which endlessly reflect everything in the room, including their own irregular contours. Koons finishes these already disorienting vignettes with tints mimicking painted shadows and other tricks of illusionistic modeling, marshaling the techniques of *trompe l'oeil* precision to dazzlingly chaotic ends. This is the perfect escapist fantasy for the end of yet another lunatic year: malformed, incoherent, and shiny.



Jeff Koons, *Stag and Dog*, 2016–24, mirror-polished stainless steel with transparent color coating, 104 × 42 5/8 × 113 3/8". Photo: Maris Hutchinson.

Schwendener, Martha. "Art on the Wall That Echoes Protests From the Streets." *The New York Times* (December 18, 2025) [ill.] [online]

The New York Times

CRITIC'S PICK

Art on the Wall That Echoes Protests From the Streets

Nicole Eisenman's latest exhibition builds on a long tradition of artists using their work to speak out against fascism and oppression.



An installation view of Nicole Eisenman's exhibit "STY." via 52 Walker, New York

By Martha Schwendener

Dec. 18, 2025, 5:00 a.m. ET

Nicole Eisenman: STY  NYT Critic's Pick

A recent article in Art in America magazine offered readers a primer on [“Five Essential Books About Anti-Fascist Art History.”](#) Timing is everything, of course, as pundits debate whether our [current era](#) is actually fascist. But if you were to look around the art world today, who would be included, 50 years from now, in such a history?

Maybe Nicole Eisenman, whose powerful and unsettling exhibition [“STY” at 52 Walker](#) in TriBeCa includes sculpture, video, painting and drawings. It follows a [retrospective](#) of her work and a 2024 piece in Madison Square Park in which a [toppled construction crane](#) served as a small rejoinder to the supertall buildings proliferating in Manhattan.

At 52 Walker, Eisenman returns to the subject with which she found fame in the 1990s: human — or humanoid — figures. The first things you see upon entering a specially constructed space in the gallery, lined with rough cellulose fiber on the walls, are three intimidating figures carved from scagliola, a plaster composite that imitates marble. The figures recall aliens and robots in 1950s science fiction films but also the [fascist penchant](#) in the 1920s and 1930s for neo-Classical sculptures with bulging muscles and oversize hands and feet. (The masked ICE agents currently deployed in many cities also could be a touchstone.)



"The Auction" (2025) via 52 Walker, New York

Collectively titled "There I Was" (2025), the three figures also carry monitors running videos made with iPhones, science fiction and horror films, and imagery generated by artificial intelligence. One of the videos depicts a descent into a tunnel — or perhaps a bunker — its walls covered with cartoonish human silhouettes. Prehistoric cave art has become [popular among contemporary artists](#) looking at the origins of image making (or as an escape from the present), but Hitler's bunker, where he holed up in the last days of his reign, also comes to mind.



Excerpt from a video within Nicole Eisenman's "There I Was," 2025. Via 52 Walker, New York; Anna And Thomas Eisenman In Collaboration With Nicole Eisenman

The paintings in the exhibition, populated with figures inspired by art history as much as by hokey Americana, focus on the relationship between the artist and the collector and the role of the artist working under fascism. In "The Auction" (2025), an auctioneer wearing a black judge's robe presides over a showroom. Nearby is a sheet torn out of a book and tacked on the wall, reproducing "For the Life of Me, I Can't See Any Swastikas" (1984), an abstract painting by the German trickster artist Martin Kippenberger.

Kippenberger's painting critiques how so-called radical abstract art often ignored or repressed politics. Meanwhile, across the room is "The Bunker" (2024-25), a painting featuring an angular cartoony figure wearing a beret — a cliché of artists, perhaps implicated under fascism.



"The Bunker," 2025 via 52 Walker, New York

More pointed references to art history appear in the painting "Archangel (The Visitors)" (2024). Here, Eisenman, 60, has reproduced the papier-mâché pig's head stuffed into a German army uniform and called the "Prussian Archangel." That sculpture appeared at [the First International Dada Fair in Berlin in 1920](#).

In Eisenman's painting, the archangel hovers over a gallery filled with visitors looking at abstract modern sculpture, while one reverent art viewer (and possible collector) has his pocket picked. Also in this painting is a detail from a photograph of Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, viewing the 1937 "[Degenerate Art](#)" exhibition, the notorious show that tried to discredit avant-garde art and its antifascist leanings.

Three folders at the gallery's front desk are filled with preparatory drawings, sketches, cartoons and photographs — gestures that underscore Eisenman's alliance with 20th-century artists who critiqued war, imperialism and fascism and were targeted by figures like Goebbels.



"Archangel (The Visitors)," 2024 Nicole Eisenman via Private Collection

Anyone following art-world politics over the last couple of years will know how this relates to Eisenman personally, as an artist who has vocally protested Israel's military strikes in Gaza. For everyone else: In October 2023, Eisenman, along with dozens of other art world denizens, signed a public letter calling for a cease-fire in Gaza. Published in Artforum, the original letter made no mention of the Hamas-led massacre of Israelis on Oct. 7; the letter was later revised, with some, including Eisenman, removing their signatures.

The fallout from the letter was swift. Eisenman, who is Jewish, reported being pressured by collectors to retract support for Palestinians and had the "[feeling of being threatened by people who I had thought of as allies in the art world.](#)"

But the relationship between artists and their patrons is often fraught, whether it's [Michelangelo hiding from the Medici family](#) after supporting a republican resistance in Florence, or the critic Clement Greenberg citing the "paradox" of avant-garde artists who are tied to "ruling class" patrons by "an umbilical cord of gold." This relationship is revealed particularly in moments like the present, rife with military conflict and authoritarian governments.

Ultimately, Eisenman's exhibition serves as a necessary exercise in soul searching. What is the role of the artist in dark times? What is the role of the critic, collector or average art viewer? Should they sit by and watch history unfold, or speak out and put themselves at risk? Eisenman sides with the Dadaists and other artists who have protested war and oppression. What about you, dear viewer?

STY

Through Jan. 10 at 52 Walker, 52 Walker Street, Manhattan; 212-727-1961, 52walker.com.

Packard, Cassie. "The Ten Best Shows in the Americas of 2025." *Frieze* (December 17, 2025) [ill.] [online]

FRIEZE

The Ten Best Shows in the Americas of 2025

From a major Jack Whitten retrospective at MoMA to a storytelling-focused SITE Santa Fe International, these are this year's standout exhibitions



BY CASSIE PACKARD IN CRITIC'S GUIDES | 17 DEC 25



Bertolt Brecht's adage about singing in dark times hovers around the edges of this list of great shows in a distinctly grim year. At The Brick and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the long-awaited 'MONUMENTS' foregrounded ongoing debates over the fate of Confederate statues; Nicole Eisenman's show at 52 Walker, New York, reckoned with some of the thorny conditions that artists face today; the first major institutional survey devoted to Wafaa Bilal, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, skewered the violences of neocolonialism; and a solo presentation of work by Carl Cheng at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, cast a gimlet eye on the complexities of the anthropocene. In no particular order, here are some of the standout exhibitions of 2025.

Nicole Eisenman | 52 Walker, New York

Nicole Eisenman, 'STY', 2025–6, exhibition view. Courtesy: 52 Walker, New York

In Nicole Eisenman's painting *The Auction* (2025), bidders at an art sale are presided over by a judge: a stand-in for a market that dictates value and reduces art to financial speculation. There's an implicit violence to the scene, stoked by the presence of a pig-headed German soldier (a reference to the 1920 First International Dada Fair) in the nearby canvas *Archangel (The Visitors)* (2024). Elsewhere in the gallery, oversize onlookers sculpted from scagliola (a decorative composite that regularly featured in Medici family commissions) bear screens that play, among other content, AI-generated imagery (*There I Was*, 2025). 'STY' asks how one makes art within, but also against and despite, various dehumanizing systems – and alludes to pressures faced by artists today who express political views not shared by their patrons. 'STY' runs until 10 January 2026.

Marchi, Paololuca Barbieri. "From Eisenman to Smith: «blue chip» artists." *Gazzetta di Parma* (December 14, 2025) [ill.] [online]

GAZZETTA DI PARMA

THE EYE OF THE DRAGON

From Eisenman to Smith: «blue chip» artists

The names, the tastes, the new trends: New York, the capital of contemporary art, seen up close.



Nicole Eisenman «The Auction», 2025, oil on canvas and linen. Courtesy 52 Walker, New York.

by [Paololuca Barbieri Marchi](#) - December 14, 2025, 6:18 PM



New York

This space is a window for the layperson into the contemporary art scene in New York and everything that revolves around it. Studio visits, interviews,

reviews... I still have to figure out what form it will take, but the goal is to bring you closer to New York contemporary art as I know it.

I'm not an art critic, so I won't try to explain the works we'll encounter; rather, I'll share my impressions or the questions they raise. The idea is to take you on a tour of New York, while you sit comfortably in the pastry shop, leafing through the Gazzetta (I'm craving cannoncini... nobody makes them here. Those with ears to hear, let them hear).

Let me preface this by saying: I'm an artist, filmmaker, and curator, so I'm inevitably biased. This doesn't mean I'm not critical or disillusioned with a system that, in recent years, has exposed some of its limitations. Censorship, speculation, power games... the art world in New York sometimes seems like a drug dealing center, or rather, a dangerous salon, where dissimulation, profit-driven logic, and rhetoric collide with noble premises and fragile intentions. The art world in New York is no joke: there are enormous sums at stake and a symbolic value that many have sought to rein in or control.

The art system is increasingly less of a free space for experimentation. Artists need to be more astute: they know this interplay of relationships is a minefield. They operate in a dystopian environment, where events matter more than facts, where narratives can upend entire careers, and where we must learn to say things without saying them.

Yet, there are still artists capable of asking uncomfortable questions, creating works so beautiful they bypass filtering and censorship systems. This is the case with **Nicole Eisenman**'s latest exhibition, which addresses speculation, commodification, and violence in the art system (and beyond) through beautiful, masterfully executed, and conceptually sophisticated paintings.

But there are few artists today who possess such a mastery of language and such profound refinement of thought, capable of speaking without speaking and asking without expecting a response. Nicole is certainly one of them. Although she doesn't currently have an exhibition in New York, I came across a painting from Josh Smith's new series, which I'm happy to share. I believe it's destined for the Miami art fair.



Josh Smith is perhaps one of New York's most successful painters: a phenomenon, both for the market and for the incredible quantity and variety of his work. Arguably one of the most exhibited and followed painters of the moment. He is represented by David Zwirner, the most powerful gallery in the world. (I promise: I'll also introduce you to the most experimental and cutting-edge galleries, but this is the week of blue-chip previews, auction houses, and big openings.)

Years ago, in one of his first exhibitions, held in a restaurant—I think it was Chinese—he wrote his name in giant letters on each painting, making his signature itself the subject of the canvas. An approach that was both punk and poetic.

Today his career has exploded: from collaborations with fashion brands to exhibitions in the most important institutions and galleries in the world.

I had the opportunity to speak to him in person last year, when he came to my exhibition. It was pouring with rain, and perhaps he was stuck in the rain, but he stopped to chat for a long time. A true painting enthusiast, he analyzed every painting by the artists present with the attention of a detective from Parma's RIS. Each canvas was a crime scene. He observed how they were mounted, how much paint, which pigments; up close, from afar... It was a group show, and he gazed with equal intensity at the paintings by famous artists and those whose creators he didn't know. He lost himself in each painting without stopping to simply "like" or "dislike." He seemed like a kid in a toy store.

He told me how layered his paintings are. He continues to paint over them, redoing them, erasing them, changing them. Each of his paintings hides dozens of others that will never see the light of day.

Being a very private person, I asked him why he decided to start a social media channel (which I recommend following: @joshiejosho), where he shows the public his studio and shares his creative process. He replied that he lives a bit like a hermit: alone in his studio for days, battling his monsters, isolated from everything. Opening a window on social media was the only way he'd found to feel closer to his friends. It made me think. He seemed sincere.

I chose to show you this painting to tell the story of this exchange, but perhaps also because, like every Parmigiano, I'm a cyclist. And New York, on a bike, is truly a different city.

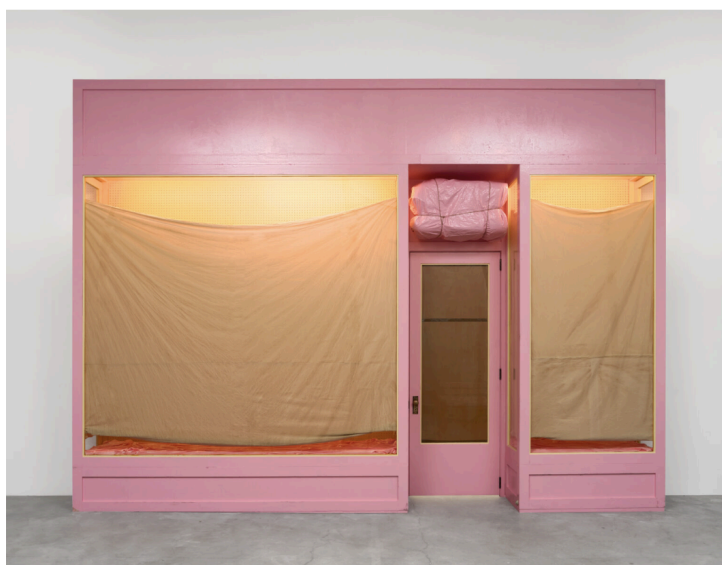
Vinler, John. “Put on Your Puffer Coat! Here’s Our Critics’ Guide to What’s On in Chelsea, Tribeca, and Brooklyn.” *Cultured* (December 5, 2025) [ill.] [online]

CULTURED

ART THE CRITICS’ TABLE WHAT’S ON

Put on Your Puffer Coat! Here’s Our Critics’ Guide to What’s On in Chelsea, Tribeca, and Brooklyn

Not in Miami? Lucky you! Here are our picks for New York gallery shows—from Nicole Eisenman and Alex Katz to Louise Bourgeois and Tishan Hsu—as we careen into the holidays.



Alex Da Corte, *Pink Store Front*, 2025. Image courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery. © Alex Da Corte

Our What’s On column distills Critics’ Table coverage—from our In Brief roundups, Big Picture essays, and Close Look reviews—and organizes our recommendations by neighborhood. **Tip:** to map our picks and plan your route, enter the Critic’s Table hashtag #TCT in the search bar of the [See Saw](#) app. Easy!

TRIBECA

Installation view of Nicole Eisenman's "STY," 2025. Image courtesy of 52 Walker, New York.

Nicole Eisenman through January 10, 2026

52 Walker | 52 Walker Street

Eisenman's entire show is like an interactive stage set for contemplating the possibilities and limitations of art's ability to address the crisis of the present. It dares to juxtapose our contemporary moment with prior historical eras, when authoritarianism, censorship, and fascism were on the rise. It implicates the whole art-world apparatus: the exchange of great sums of money in the auction house, as well as the gallery system of which 52 Walker is part. Eisenman parodies herself, not as a singular genius within that system, but instead—echoing Jean Genet—as a petty thief. —*John Vincler*

Read more from Vincler's *Close Look on Eisenman* [here](#).

David Zwirner

Judah, Hettie. "American art enters its paranoid phase." *Apollo Magazine* (November 24, 2025) [ill.] [online]

APOLLO
THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

American art enters its paranoid phase

Hettie Judah

24 NOVEMBER 2025

COMMENT

Pruning (2025; detail), Sasha Gordon. Courtesy the artist/David Zwirner, New York; © the artist



For contemporary artists such as Sasha Gordon and Nayland Blake the current moment screams unease

David Zwirner

For contemporary artists such as Sasha Gordon and Nayland Blake the current moment screams unease

From the December 2025 issue of Apollo. Preview and subscribe [here](#).

The exhibition 'Sixties Surreal' at New York's Whitney Museum explores Surrealism not at its Parisian roots but decades later, as an expressive mode in American art. It is a show of light and dark. Surrealism influenced art of many moods, from the gutter wit of Claes Oldenburg's *Soft Toilet* to Lee Bontecou's ominous, machine-like reliefs.

With its conceptual roots in psychoanalysis, Surrealism was a mode impeccably suited to a mid-century American population in thrall to self-examination. The Surrealists' fascination with dreams chimed with the psychedelic revelations of flower children, and their upfront engagement with sexuality with the liberatory tenets of free love. Juxtapositions achieved through collage proved a subversive tool for revolutionary social movements. Among the revolutionaries was the feminist Martha Rosler, whose activist art pasted pornographic images of women's bodies on to adverts for domestic appliances, suggesting both as goods available for ownership. Swerving literal representation, Surrealism also offered a powerful means by which to explore the violence of the era both at home and abroad.

Entrance (2025), Nayland Blake. ©
Nayland Blake



Midway through the period explored in 'Sixties Surreal', the historian Richard Hofstadter identified a tendency he dubbed, in the title of an essay of 1964, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics'. The paranoid style encompassed qualities of 'heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy', and was characterised by 'paranoid modes of expression by more or less normal people' in which 'the feeling of persecution is central [and] systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy'. Just as the Surrealism of 1920s Paris offers a way to read American art of the 1960s, so Hofstadter's concept of paranoid style offers well-tuned tools with which to approach the politics of our time.

David Zwirner

Hofstadter used the term, he wrote, ‘much as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style. It is, above all, a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself.’ If Hofstadter can plunder art history, I feel no compunction about appropriating his coinage in return, for I can think of no more appropriate phrase to characterise this moment in American art.

Recently shown at David Zwirner’s New York gallery, Sasha Gordon’s paintings embody paranoid style at its most apocalyptic. *It Was Still Far Away* (2024) seats the artist’s likeness on a picnic blanket in unpopulated parkland. In isolated oblivion, headphones covering her ears, she remains intent on trimming her toenails even as they are warmed by the hot pink glow of an exploding mushroom cloud erupting in the middle distance.



Pruning (2025), Sasha Gordon.
Courtesy the artist/David
Zwirner, New York; © the artist

David Zwirner

It Was Still Far Away was followed by a gallery of monumental paintings, each of which embodies acute psychological harm of one sort or another. The borders of *Pruning* (2025) are painted like strips of metal studded with bolts, between which Gordon appears, bound and naked, staring out from a tank of water, while a naked figure bears down on her head, keeping her submerged.

The figures in *Petrified* (2025) are both encrusted with muddy clay, one lying on the grey puddled ground, the other striding forward victoriously with a rope. Winning or losing seems immaterial, for there is nothing in this denuded scene with its swampy ground, ruined barn and chipped picket fence worth fighting for. In *A Visitation* (2025), Gordon again appears doubled, isolated within a cone of light in a dark room. One body slumps back over a chair – dead, dreaming or unconscious – while the other looms furiously, fingers digging deep into the flesh of the other's shoulders.

In part, Gordon's paintings engage with the question of how (or perhaps why) to make art at a time of war and political tumult. It is a question that famously bedevilled Philip Guston, and one revisited by Nicole Eisenman in her 2024 painting *Fiddle V. Burns* (first shown at Sadie Coles HQ in London last year, now displayed at 52 Walker in New York). *Fiddle V. Burns* pictures the artist in a pit in the ground, straining, brush in hand, to catch a glimpse of the world beyond while the caterpillar tracks of a military tank roll above their head. Is painting in a time of crisis merely fiddling while Rome burns (or performing a pedicure while the world explodes), or is it the artist's duty?

David Zwirner

Installation view of *Fiddle v. Burns* by Nicole Eisenman at 52 Walker, New York in 2025. Courtesy 52 Walker; © Nicole Eisenman



Gordon's paintings also engage with the broader field of paranoia – intrusive thoughts, catastrophising, panic, errant yearnings. These are aspects of paranoid style that she holds in common with other artists showing in New York, among them Nayland Blake. This autumn Blake took over both of Matthew Marks's Chelsea galleries. One building was home to a survey of sculptures and videos made in the 1990s during what we are now unfortunately obliged to recognise as the Culture Wars: Round One. The front end of the other building carried an exhibition Blake curated of small works with hand-made appeal. A surprise lurked behind a barricaded door: the gallery's back room outfitted as a combined therapy suite and sex dungeon, entitled *Session*.

At the end of its wipe-clean couch were strung tin cans, each labelled with a potential betrayal – of family, of class, of community. The walls carried a battery of instruments, ranging from sexual apparatus to a small tinsel Christmas tree. Here was a room in which to feel the weight of guilt, the quality of paranoia, and to seek its expurgation. Blake noted the two professions that refer to appointments as a 'session': the psychoanalyst and the professional dominant. Not mentioned on this list, but implicated, is that exquisitely sensitive paranoiac, the artist.

From the December 2025 issue of *Apollo*. Preview and subscribe [here](#).

Howe, Sophie. "Nicole Eisenman: STY, at David Zwirner." *Whitehot Magazine* (November 21, 2025) [ill.] [online]



Nicole Eisenman: STY, at David Zwirner



Nicole Eisenman, installation view, courtesy of David Zwirner

By SOPHIE HOWE November 21st, 2025

Since moving from London back to New England, I've become disillusioned by the possibility of maintaining a connection to the commercial fine art world where everything moves quickly in a whirling microcosm. I've been trying to write responses to contemporary exhibitions as I did with my response to Nicole Eisenman's show at Whitechapel Gallery in London. I no longer possess the same kind of easy access to major cosmopolitan gallery shows. I wonder what changes when the viewpoint of the reviewer is shifted? Can reviewing virtually perform the assumed function?

My auto fictional response to Eisenman's show *What Happened* was published by Whitechapel Gallery where the show took place in 2023/2024. Eisenman's painted figures from *Beer Garden with Ulrike and Celeste* (2009), *The Triumph of Poverty* (2009) and *Selfie* (2014) became members of my family at Christmas, tangled up in considerations of global affairs that took place in the years that Eisenman created those paintings. Her subjects are harrowing, casual in their desperate states and despite their muddling anatomical impossibilities, immediately recognizable. Even when I had physical access, I still chose to respond based on my virtual experience. Through researching Eisenman, I found the contextual entry point that resonated.



Beer Garden with Ulrike and Celeste, 2009. Oil on canvas. 165.1 × 208.3 cm. (L)

Seder, 2010. Oil on canvas. 99 x 122 cm (R)

Nicole Eisenman: *What Happened*, 11 October 2023 – 14 January 2024, installation view: Whitechapel Gallery, London. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery. Photo: Damian Griffiths.

If you apply a theory of care in Emmanuel Lévinas' style, you might argue that because I have not had a face-to-face interaction with the pieces in Eisenman's show, I have not generated care. He writes: "The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no 'interiority' permits avoiding." I did not look into the eyes of the paintings, but my connection to her work is a testament to Eisenman's efficacy of communicating humanity. Even of a sickly-green man with a front-butt, even through the glow of a screen.

When I examined her work through the Whitechapel website, I zoomed in and put my face very close to the screen. I could look as close as I wanted without setting off any alarms. The interface of the gallery's website was effective in creating a blank space around the photographs of the paintings, forming a penetrable membrane where I could easily slide between the paintings like connective tissue. It allowed me to control the pace of digestion and my interpretation of the narrative. This experience was one of solitude, without the competitive, provocative, social performance of attending a show. There is no possibility to show face, to network, but instead one becomes absorbed by the glow of the screen.

Now on from October 30th to January 10th is Nicole Eisenman's show, *STY*, at David Zwirner in New York. Alongside a collection of paintings is *There I Was* (2025), Scagliola and rock humanoid forms, whose figures have been manipulated to suit the needs of monitors playing videos. This is the first time Eisenman has worked with Scagliola, but the techno-human relation is reminiscent of her aptly named *Death Disco* (2010). If you've ever loved a DJ, truly loved and deified them, you might see yourself in the despairing amorphous blob of Munch-like Screamers huddled to the left of the precocious disc jockey. If you've ever been tethered to technology, you might see yourself in the slouch of the faceless sculptural group. This is Eisenman's magic: her ability to translate the grasp that technology can have on human relations. This yearning is only heightened when experienced virtually.



Nicole Eisenman, installation view, courtesy of David Zwirner

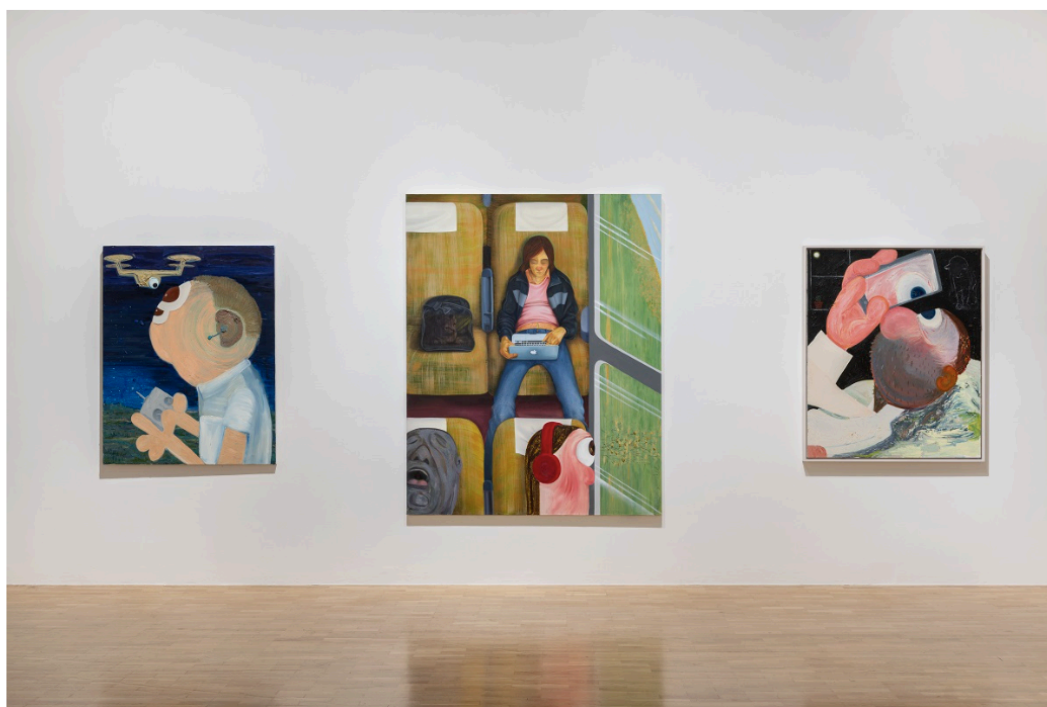
In art school as a writer, I would present my short stories in formal critiques. Sometimes I would read aloud, or place the pages on the floor for readers to engage with at their own pace. It didn't matter the mode of presentation, the feedback was always: "Why did you choose to print the pages on A4 paper?" What I hoped to receive was feedback on the content on an emotional and grammatical level, not a questioning of the materiality. I was constantly met with reminders that I wasn't in a writing workshop. I thought I was. I'd hoped for a hybrid, fluid exchange between "fine art" and a writing practice. I couldn't understand how they were not one and the same. A perceived limitation of access being the way that written word was ingested by the reader rendered any non-visual, non-passive art form useless. I wish that I could inject a story directly into the consciousness of the audience, but a mediator must always be present in some capacity. The closest thing to a removal of a mediator is a liminal space. This focus on materiality is a misdirection away from concept, which falls under a similar category of an over-emphasis on the positionality of work in an exhibition space.

In a dialogue between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson: 'What is a Museum?' Kaprow states "There was once an art which was conceived for the museums, and the fact that the museums look like mausolea may actually reveal to us the attitude we've had to art in the past. It was a form of paying respect to the dead." Is reviewing a show you've only viewed online the contemporary art-world manifestation of live streaming funerals? Instead, the introduction of the virtual exhibition space allows for a place for art to have an after-life.



Nicole Eisenman: What Happened, 11 October 2023 – 14 January 2024, installation view: Whitechapel Gallery, London. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery. Photo: Damian Griffiths.

Smithson responds to Kaprow: “I think that the best thing you can say about museums is that they really are nullifying in regard to action. I’m interested for the most part in what’s not happening, that area between events which could be called the gap.” What is more empty and void-like than the internet? The step beyond the white cube is the website designer’s use of #FFFFFF. Smithson died before the age of the internet, but I am curious how he would engage with its nullity. To follow his mode of thought, the museum is a dead space, therefore the internet is a dead space, he is interested in this dead space. Kaprow and Smithson are suggesting that the museum is where work goes to die, but this forgettable, printer-paper like space can uplift the work itself in its nonexistence. Maybe Smithson is floating around on the electromagnetic waves, experiencing exhibitions via gallery websites. This virtual death actually breeds longevity, transforming cold solemnity into accessibility. When the ambience of a physical space is removed, only the work itself is left. The body, the outfit, the social connections of the viewer are non-existent. The viewer is everywhere and nowhere, giving back some of the purpose to the art.



Nicole Eisenman: What Happened, 11 October 2023 – 14 January 2024, installation view: Whitechapel Gallery, London. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery. Photo: Damian Griffiths.

There is capturing the methodology of the dynamic between the gallery and the artist, and then there is taking pictures and uploading them to the website. In this digital age, it is in the curator's interest to replicate the show to its full extent virtually. This way, there is still the possibility to guide the eye of the viewer in a Temple Grandin style procession through the gallery. The traditional review is built toward how the work will be perceived by a potential buyer instead of being oriented towards the vision of the artist. When the curator's voice is distilled through a transference, it reveals a non-commercial, dematerialised emphasis on the artist. This is not a catch-all act. The sublime cannot be replicated through a phone screen; you can't become so small in the face of the old masters. When their paintings are uploaded online and digitized in ultra high resolution, the sense of proportion is lost.

Understanding the museum as mausolea is a way of highlighting the dissonance between the art and the viewer. The confines of the established mode of silent obedience in a white cube space can be co-opted or reclaimed by viewing it online. If you, the reviewer, are floating in liminality, you don't have to subscribe to the rules of the mausolea. Now with the introduction of the internet, that intersection becomes both more distant and more accessible. This spatial distance between the reviewer and the reviewed further connects the two figures. Perhaps it is a generative force, this techno-human collaboration, resulting in more observation, less hierarchy, more conversation, more ghosts. Look at Eisenman, no matter the lens. She will teach you something about your heart. **WM**

Endnotes

What is a Museum?' A dialogue between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson (1967), in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings (1996).

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquense University Press, 1961.

Vinler, John. "If Antifa Was a Painter: Critic John Vinler on the Mischievous Genius of Nicole Eisenman." *Cultured Magazine* (November 5, 2025) [ill.] [online]

CULTURED

If Antifa Was a Painter: Critic John Vinler on the Mischievous Genius of Nicole Eisenman

In "STY" at 52 Walker, Nicole Eisenman presents new paintings and hybrid video-sculptures, spoofing the art-world machine through sharp parody and historical allusion.

WORDS

John Vinler

November 5, 2025



Installation view of Nicole Eisenman's "STY," 2025. Image courtesy of 52 Walker, New York.

Nicole Eisenman

52 Walker | 52 Walker Street

Through January 10, 2026

A man in a brown shirt, in the center of Nicole Eisenman's painting *The Auction*, 2025, raises his hand to place a bid. Or maybe he is Sieg Heiling. Under scrutiny, the picture dissolves into multiple or layered scenarios. The auctioneer seems to be wearing the robe of a judge, the electronic chart above him displays currency exchange rates, and where the ceiling should be is a moody moonlit night sky instead. The painting on offer in the middle of the scene is a milky white expanse pocked with impasto blobs in earth tones, arranged in clusters like Hannah Wilke's bite-sized gum sculptures. (A similar, smaller painting waits in the wings at left.) The assembled characters in the surrounding crowd are rendered in a variety of styles, from the realism of the possible-Nazi to the post-Cubist, post-Guston caricature in the foreground on the right who's also attempting to win the lot. *The Auction* could be the composite, collaborative work of half a dozen different painters, but in its ambition and tightly managed balance of coherence and ambiguity, it can only be the work of Nicole Eisenman.

As I considered this picture, I moved to examine a scrap of paper pinned to the wall 10 feet or so to the right, where I found—as if anticipating my train of thought—a color printout of Martin Kippenberger's 1984 geometric abstraction *For the Life of Me, I Can't See Any Swastikas*. In the German artist's composition of layered rectangles, Eisenman—whose family fled Nazi persecution in the 1930s—seems to find precedent for her own reflection on modernism's fascist haunting as well as the aesthetics of its contemporary resurgence.



Installation view of Nicole Eisenman's "STY," 2025. Image courtesy of 52 Walker.

“STY” is the New York-based artist’s first hometown solo exhibition following her three-decade spanning institutional survey that originated in Munich, before traveling to the Whitechapel Gallery in London and concluding at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2024. For this show, 52 Walker has been transformed into a single room, divided off from the entryway and front desks, and lined with Homasote board, which is commonly used in art studios to facilitate the ease of installation and deinstallation of artworks. Curator Ebony L. Haynes gets the scale potentially right here, providing both a concentrated show, as well as a hint of insight into the artist’s working process by creating an atmosphere that seems to welcome the viewer into the private space of the artist, an effect emphasized by the inclusion of reference ephemera (such as the Kippenberger) sourced from Eisenman’s Brooklyn studio.

Despite its title, “STY” conjures a tidy intimacy. But there is a pig present. In a second crowd-scene painting, *Archangel (The Visitors)*, 2024, a swine-headed cartoon soldier floats above a lively group gathered for an art opening. They converse among modernist, abstract sculptures on plinths. In an attic space above, stacks of canvas are stored, their surfaces otherwise out of view. In the foreground at right, a self-portrait of the artist appears to pick the pocket of a balding man in a tweed suit who is distractedly engrossed in sculptural details. The compositional setting collapses historical moments, mashing together the present with the First International Dada Fair, held in Berlin in 1920, where a pig-faced papier-mâché effigy of a German soldier was hung from the ceiling causing a scandal.

Eisenman’s entire show is like an interactive stage set for contemplating the possibilities and limitations of art’s ability to address the crisis of the present. It dares to juxtapose our contemporary moment with prior historical eras, when authoritarianism, censorship, and fascism were on the rise. It implicates the whole art-world apparatus: the exchange of great sums of money in the auction house, as well as the gallery system of which 52 Walker is part. Eisenman parodies herself, not as a singular genius within that system, but instead—echoing Jean Genet—as a petty thief. (This isn’t entirely new for the artist: For her first appearance in the Whitney Biennial, in 1995, she painted a mural of the museum, depicting it after an explosion, with herself at the center of the ruins.) The theater of it all—and her work *is* an entertaining performance—distracts from the fact that the artist has taken real risks with her political stances, particularly for calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, which prompted backlash from collectors.



Image by Nicole Eisenman, 2025. Image courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker.

The most significant artists are often ones that make audiences and fellow artists say some version of “I didn’t know you could do that?” And, with the best artists, this reaction often corresponds to both technical proficiency and their approach to subject-matter and composition. Eisenman accompanies the five oil paintings and two works on paper (in addition to the reference images culled from the studio) with a set of three statues made from scagliola, a plaster material dating back to ancient Rome, which was revived in 16th-century Italy, especially in the decorative flourishes favored by the Medici family. The sculptures—collectively titled *There I Was, 2025*—are mounted on rock bases. Each holds a large flatscreen monitor that plays a video work: a virtuosic mashup of ancient technique and bleeding-edge tech. They form a lyrical send-up of the contemporary notion of *screen time*.

The promotional image for the show appears to graft a black-and-white picture of one of Eisenman’s sculptures onto an edited and pared-down archival photo of Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels entering the Degenerate Art Exhibition, staged in Munich in 1937. While noting Eisenman’s healthy willingness to parody the role of the artist, in sum, the force of “STY” sides with artistic freedom in the face of state repression, and is animated by a nuanced yet forceful antifascism.

But Eisenman herself might remind us that many trace the origin of the Roman salute (later adopted by the German Nazi Party) not to ancient Rome, but to the painter Jacques Louis David. His 1784 scene of young men taking up arms in *The Oath of the Horatii* was completed a decade before he would be jailed for participating in the French Revolution—and two decades before he would paint the *Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine*, 1804, on his way to become the Emperor’s great propagandist. It’s as if Eisenman cautions: Consider the enduring, ever-mutating symbolic content of art, as well as the stakes of the present moment—sure. But never fully trust a painter.

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The New York Times

A Full Season of Art to See at Museums and Galleries Across the U.S.

The fall schedule includes a number of exhibitions that look at works from Italy and France and the cultural events that shaped them.



"Barbeque" (1982) by Eric Fischl is part of the exhibition "Eric Fischl: Stories Told" at the Phoenix Art Museum. Eric Fischl

By Morgan Malget

Oct. 14, 2025

This article is part of the [Fine Arts & Exhibits](#) special section on how creativity can inspire in challenging times.

Every fall, an abundance of museum exhibitions and gallery shows opens across the United States — and this season is no exception.

A number of those shows will transport audiences to France and Italy. In Seattle, visitors can dig into the ways in which Impressionists portrayed culinary culture in France in the late 19th century, and in Kansas City, Mo., a museum explores the hardships Parisians faced during World War I. A New York City show examines the rise of Italian Fascism through the lens of Futurism, and in Houston, an exhibition travels back to the first century to delve into Emperor Trajan's cultural impact on Rome.

For a connection closer to home, how about a gallery in Pittsburgh showcasing Frank Lloyd Wright's unrealized projects for the area, or an exhibition in Billings, Mont., that features local women who offer diverse perspectives through textile works? With a wide range of subjects and mediums, hopefully all museum lovers can explore their personal [Roman Empires](#) this fall. Here is a selection.

New York

NEW YORK CITY

[“Nicole Eisenman: STY”](#)

The New York artist Nicole Eisenman is known for her expressive paintings and sculptures that capture everyday life with humor and flair. Presented here are three new sculptures with video elements and a selection of her paintings, including new pieces and loans from public collections. These works aim to piece together a narrative and offer a glimpse into Eisenman's state of mind. Oct. 30 through Jan. 10; David Zwirner Gallery, 52 Walker, davidzwirner.com