

# VULTURE

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## A World Without Weather

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



*Winter in L.A.*, by Hilary Pecis. Photo: Ed Mumford, courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery

The painter Hilary Pecis has made a necessary change in her work. Her previous shows at Rachel Uffner — featuring highly colored landscapes, still lifes, and interiors — were lovely but felt like a decorative holding pattern. Her current show at David Kordansky Gallery is a breakthrough that sees her both zeroing in on deeper solitudes and spiraling out into eccentric reveries. It is evidence that Pecis is not just another Los Angeles painter selling tasty flat images. “I’m trying to figure out how to make a painting,” she told me over text. “I wish I had the confidence of a big, gestured mark maker but alas I’m still always trying to figure out how to paint.” This is the mystery at play in every artist: not to know what they’re doing but learning how to do it.

The new works are two-dimensional sublimities of color, texture, and com-

plexity, as if fellow Angeleno Jonas Wood's large smooth paintings had been mixed with Matisse, the Pattern and Decoration painters of the 1970s (most of whom were women), and Hallmark greeting cards. Dangerously enticing territory, in other words.

In her best paintings, we are privy to suspended moments of peace. In *Winter in L.A.*, I get a terrible envy of the outward beauty and physical ease of Southern California. A world without weather, days without humidity, lives green with plants. Pecis works in Van Gogh-like individual strokes, out of which appear chairs, a couch, a coffee table with a bouquet, and a Christmas tree — slightly incongruous, to these East Coast eyes, anyway, with the verdant trees and purple mountains beyond the window.

She's great at bookshelves. The names are like a frieze on a temple. Van Gogh, Niki de Saint Phalle, William Blake, Cézanne, Eva Hesse, Albert York, Gabriele Münter — a declaration of totemic kinships and a family tree of influences. Artists live in these pictures.

Pecis's paintings become controlled lava flows of form, shadow, and detail. We see photographs, a picture of a horse, gridded window screens. In *Office*, there's a microwave supporting a cup, a thermos, and a lemon — a wee still life. There's a Mondrian-like order and geometry to everything, most prominently seen in *Sharon Flowers*, a depiction of an L.A. storefront. There are vases filled with freshly picked sunflowers, aging brickwork, a pocked sidewalk. She delights in her own calligraphy, carefully rendering every letter and the phone number on the store's sign. Everything in the painting is just so clean, down to the flowers growing atop the building.

All these moments of life painted in the flattest of ways, altars and tabernacles of our seen world. Pecis made a good move. She's poised to really spread her wings.