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Dike Blair: 'Capturing Everyday Moments'
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by Jody Zellen



Dike Blair is a New York-based artist, writer and curator. He is often associated with the “Pictures Generation” and known for his sculptural assemblages, as well as his realistic paintings. While his sculptures are conceptual and minimal, his small-scale gouache (at first), and now oil paintings, are more painterly and representational.

In these works, he captures everyday moments. They derive from both analogue and digital photographs he has taken over several decades and gathered into an archive. What is a moment? How moments mark or trigger memories is the subject of his ongoing investigations. When going through an archive of photographic images, Blair must decide which he will translate into paintings, with the motivations for these choices also filtering into the exhibition.

Many of the images are banal locations or non-spectacular, people-less scenes that are casually framed, though not without compositional and formal considerations. Light also plays an important role in the pictures. While they could be divided into categories— food and drink, walls or corners, what is seen through a window, illuminated roads at night— Blair sequences the images on the wall to suggest narratives. The twenty paintings on view range in size from 6 x 8 inches to 28 x 21 inches. All are untitled and were painted between 2020 and 2023. These oil on aluminum works are both vertical and horizontal, and many have the casualness and the format of cell phone photographs. His choice of surface and paint application add to their intriguing flat character.

The paintings that focus on corners of elevator interiors or bathroom doors have a peculiar draw. These include an image whose focal point is a partially rusted “slide bolt door lock” that joins together off white and industrial green surfaces— perhaps the inside of a bathroom stall. In an *Untitled* painting dated 2023, Blair renders the jarringly bright mustard-yellow wall inside an elevator, as well as its reflection in the adjacent steel panels. The composition focuses on a corner and divides the image into two parallelograms and a triangle (the floor). In a similar painting from 2020, Blair paints another elevator interior. Here, the walls are wood grain and off white and include a silver handrail. A small triangle at the bottom of the painting highlights a blue and white checkered floor that could be carpet.

Commonplace spaces and everyday objects trigger something for Blair— enough to first photograph and then to select particular images from his archive to reproduce as paintings. The resulting images are formal explorations of contrast, color and texture, while simultaneously referencing nondescript places that could be anywhere. Blair’s interiors also capture a certain kind of artificial light. His exteriors and paintings looking through windows present the colors and

glows found in nature. One painting depicts blurred pink flowers and green grass as seen through closed textured glass window louvers. Blair juxtaposes the brightness of the outside with a portion of the darker window sill and frame. In another painting, he allows a deep blue sky with a few floating white clouds to dominate another space framed by a fragment of interior architecture.

Exteriors at night include an image shot from inside a car of an empty country road receding into the distance. The car's headlights illuminate a two lane road, a grassy shoulder and a red barn. In another painting, Blair focuses on the way two tall trees are lit by lights in an otherwise empty and dark parking lot. He often photographs what he eats and drinks, here including a painting of a slice of orangey yellow fruit cake without a plate on a black table. Another painting depicts a cigarette in an ashtray next to a cup of coffee in a white mug and yet another is a cocktail in a translucent blue glass set on a tray on top of a labeled napkin on a United Airlines plane.

Blair has remarked that while his original photographs are not all that interesting, they are shot and composed with the knowledge they will be transformed into paintings that will be seen as a group so that viewers can construct a narrative. The works collapse space and time, as they come from various years and places, yet together become an intimate and personal look at the details of everyday life that surround us.

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