

DOLBY CHADWICK GALLERY

Terry Powers

The Drift

Dolby Chadwick Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by Terry Powers, on view this summer. Painting without any preconceptions about outcome, Powers works from observation, capturing moments from everyday life with profound eloquence and honesty.

Because the moments Powers chronicles relate to his own life—indeed, many of the paintings feature his home or backyard—his work can be read as autobiographical. This comes as no accident. Powers notes a keen interest in the life stories of artists and other figures throughout history. He also has a deep admiration for artists working in the intimist tradition, from Edouard Vuillard, to the 1950s New York cohort that included Fairfield Porter and Jane Freilicher, to contemporary painters like George Nick and Susanna Coffey. Like Powers, these artists take as their subject matter scenes of domesticity, landscapes near their homes, portraits of loved ones, and close-up views of daily life. For Powers, it is critical that these subjects are not consciously sought out but rather organically intersect with his day, the significance of which he underscores by citing a quote from Porter: “An artist who seeks subject matter is like a person who cannot get up in the morning until he understands the meaning of life.” Truth, as it were, cannot be predetermined.

Perhaps the purest distillation of Powers’s interest in observation is *The Drift*, a series of small, documentary-style paintings on paper. As the title suggests, this series plunges viewers into “the drift”—the flow of life’s fleeting moments. Among these moments is a colourful tableau of children’s toys, the lace-like pattern of tree leaves seen from below, and a trio of helium balloons from the artist’s fortieth birthday quietly skimming the ceiling. Such everyday minutiae are what bring color and dimension to a person’s existence, inching us closer to a fuller understanding of who they are—not those big pivotal moments like marriages, milestones, and grand achievements that comprise only a small fraction of one’s life. If these paintings reveal the richness of the everyday, so too do they work in reverse by enriching the day to day; as Powers explains: “Because I try to just respond to what’s around me, everything has potential to be a painting, and it’s a great way to live—feeling like you’re surrounded by infinite paintings.”

In the tradition of artists like Raymond Pettibon and Muntean & Rosenblum, text at the bottom of each painting thickens the plot. Sometimes it decodes a scene, sometimes it documents the artist’s thoughts in that moment, and sometimes it hints at larger political or social undercurrents—a through-line for fellow observational painter Liu Xiaodong, whom Powers holds in high regard. Different images, objects, and ideas connect across the works so that, when taken together, they create a larger web of meaning and interconnection.

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Whereas the paintings in *The Drift* are small, fast, and loosely rendered, others take longer to complete and are larger and more tightly composed. In one, titled *Melissa Watching Season Six of Alone Because She Wants to Move to the Wilderness* (2021), his wife can be seen standing in their living room watching TV, framed by a doorway leading from the garage. In the foreground is a table saw surrounded by other artefacts of domestic life: a laundry unit, a bookshelf, a model boat, a tapestry. The composition of this and another large-scale painting featuring Melissa is heavily influenced, the artist explains, by Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (ca. 1560), the title of which refers to a tiny action in the background. Such a twist reverses the hierarchy of norms in art, which privileges the foreground and dictates our attention. These works also upend expectations through their treatment of their subject. While the individual elements within *Melissa Watching Season Six...* can be read as pieces within a larger narrative puzzle, it is the whole itself that bears symbolic weight: By taking a small, intimate moment and scaling it up, attending to it with an almost baroque level of detail, Powers elevates the prosaic into something grand and meaningful in itself.

Terry Powers was born in 1980 in Sacramento. He earned a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design followed by an MFA from Stanford University. He was awarded a residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris and in 2017 was named the Diebenkorn Fellow. This is his first solo show with Dolby Chadwick Gallery.