

A WOMEN'S THING

ART ART HISTORY CULTURE EXHIBITIONS COMMUNITY

Framed Lives: Patty Horing and the Psychology of Portraiture

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Opening October 16 at the Anna Zorina Gallery in New York, “Reflection” marks Patty Horing’s fourth solo exhibition with the gallery. Known for her psychologically charged portraits, Horing explores the subtleties of human character and self-presentation: how we reveal, conceal, and curate our identities within the frames of daily life.

Executed with remarkable intuition and empathy, her paintings situate subjects amid personal objects, iconography, and domestic spaces that extend their inner worlds. Horing’s figures often appear within mirrors, windows, computer screens, or the confines of a smartphone, each acting as a contemporary “frame within a frame.” This recurring motif blurs the line between voyeur and viewed, intimacy and isolation, reflection and projection.

Unabashed in her portrayal of imperfection and humanity, Horing captures the psychological charge of modern existence and our simultaneous desire for connection and self-containment. In “Reflection,” this tension takes center stage, as figures interact, withdraw, or coexist, embodying the post-pandemic complexities of togetherness and solitude.

Complementing these monumental canvases, Horing also debuts “Intimate Vessels,” a new series of ceramic works that extend her exploration of form, identity, and emotional containment. Ahead of the exhibition, A Women’s Thing sat down with the artist to discuss her process, inspirations, and what lies beneath the surface of her latest work.

Your exhibition “Reflection” centers on urban interiors, “framing” your subjects in glass (e.g. windows, mirrors, screens) perhaps as an invitation to explore how we perceive ourselves and others. What drew you to this particular visual language of reflection and containment?

Patty Horing: As a longtime resident of New York City, I am deeply aware of the lure of highly constructed, man-made spaces and how we create our own worlds within them, removed from nature. We nest and work in glass boxes in the sky, and our attention is constantly drawn to smaller glass rectangles (phone, computers, TVs), so we are sandwiched sandwiched both physically and psychologically in these interior realms. This thinking about interior spaces and the reflective elements in our architecture, decor, and devices seemed like an interesting place, both conceptually and formally, through which to approach my usual practice of painting people.



ANNA ZORINA GALLERY

Many of your works feature intimate domestic or psychological portraits, yet with a simultaneous sense of self-observation. What is it that draws you to a subject or a scene? What elements of the human condition do you wish to explore with your portraits?

Horing: My goal in making paintings of people is to hit on some feeling of psychological truth about an individual person or a situation. Like good fiction, if something is specific enough to seem true, it can in turn feel universal in its essential humanness. I'm sure you're right that every portrait is both a depiction of the subject and the artist simultaneously, if only subconsciously. In terms of which aspects of 'the human condition' I want to explore, I lean in to self awareness and humor and avoid sentimentality and pathos. Sometimes the truth of a moment comes from the subjects themselves, from the actual relationships that are hinted at in multi-figure scenes, and in other instances I stage the scenes as I might in a play. Essentially, I want the viewer to come away both knowing and wanting to know more about the complicated human beings in the works.



"Conference Room A" (diptych) by Patty Horing.

"Conference Room A" is a striking reworking of Balthus's "The Mountain," transposed into a corporate conference room. For Balthus, the painting represented a sense of bucolic longing (he was working in his Paris studio yearning for an escape). Your work seems to flip this on its head: the all-female protagonists appear to be longing for anything but their present state. What compelled you to reinterpret this canonical image?

Horing: I have been intrigued by "The Mountain" since I first saw it at the Met many years ago. The poses are so odd for the setting, and as in almost all of Balthus's multifigural scenes, the characters are in proximity but don't really interact or connect with each other. I had thought, "these figures could be anywhere..." so I put them in a corporate conference room in very similar poses: sleeping on the floor, stretching, kneeling, etc.

But now they are exclusively female, and their leisure is a form of resistance.

The corporate setting is in a Manhattan high rise, and the women's only access to nature is via a recurring image (Balthus's mountain minus its people) on their computer screens. For me it's both a sad and funny commentary on this moment in time. It resonates on a few levels.

ANNA ZORINA GALLERY

With your “Together” series, we glimpse a couple navigating private life in an expansive, high-rise interior. Do you see these paintings as a reflection of post-Covid habits of withdrawal? Are they also a meditation on comfort and chosen solitude?

Horing: Yes, all of the above! “Together” is a group of five large paintings that function as a sort of portrait of a post-Covid relationship. The decor, objects, and clothing all function to reinforce elements of the characters’ identities in their shared private world. Across five images these scenes both acknowledge and poke fun at our shared vanities, inscrutability to each other, external fears, amusements and potential for true connection.

Your self-portrait “When I Grow Up I Want to Be an Old Woman” playfully stages a dialogue between your present and younger self. What does this gesture reveal about your relationship to time, identity, and the act of self-portraiture?

Horing: I made that painting recently, upon turning 60, which felt like a big shift into a new phase of life and one that deserved a painting! Especially for women in contemporary American culture, aging is almost an embarrassment, something to be avoided, hidden, disavowed. I do mourn my youthful appearance at times, but I also love how much more knowledge, experience, reason, reading, and friendship lives in my brain now.



“When I Grow Up I Want to Be An Old Woman” by Patty Horing.

So this little painting was a searching process about those contradictions. In the painting a frank half-nude portrayal at the center is flanked by a hand-mirror image of my idealized physical past on one side, and on the other side is my wished-for future in the form of art: a muse by a window, a cribbed miniature of female Renaissance painter Sofonisba Anguissola’s self-portrait at 78. Plus my little dog Luna, just because I love her.

This is my attempt at celebrating aging.

On Recent Commissions

You were recently commissioned to paint Judge Betty Weinberg Ellerin (a remarkable honor, no doubt). How did you approach capturing both the likeness and the legacy of someone with such stature?

Horing: It was so inspiring to meet Betty Weinberg Ellerin and a great privilege and honor to paint her portrait. I spent time with her in her home, which is as warm and lovely as she is, and thoroughly enjoyed her animated storytelling and reminiscing. We took a bunch of reference photos and she shared pictures of herself from her many years on the bench. She is well into her 90s now, and I was aiming to create a somewhat timeless portrait of her, so those historical images were very helpful to me. I hope the final piece shows her fierce intelligence and tough spirit, but with the underpinning of her warmth and humor.

ANNA ZORINA GALLERY

Finally, what feels most urgent to you right now in your studio practice: technical experimentation, storytelling, social commentary, or something else entirely?

Horing: I am just finishing up a studio expansion renovation, and I actually think the larger space could be instrumental in pushing my practice in new directions at the most basic and practical level. I have been thinking about large drawings. Big wall space was not an option before, so I want to put big paper or mylar up there and do some free drawing and see where it takes me.

In terms of my usual painting practice, I went pretty big for “Reflection” and am now feeling the impulse to make small paintings. Storytelling and social commentary are always at the heart of what I care about in terms of the narrative of a work, and so those will remain, but I hope to experiment with some different technical approaches and materials next.