

Theta

Kelsey Isaacs

September 8 - October 21, 2023

Intricate layers of plastic shape obscure landscapes in Kelsey Isaacs's paintings. On the glossy floor of her studio shower, the artist arranges synthetic, often reflective or translucent, materials as ad-hoc stages, spotlighted by the concentrated glow of handheld flashlights. The outcomes of Isaacs's private rituals are photographed from multiple perspectives and rendered in oil. These paintings form the artist's first solo exhibition at Theta.

Isaacs reanimates scenes of adornment and accumulation through painting. She uses inexpensive items that channel light or shine, and consequently, mimic glitz. These are shifty things. From object to photographic subject, to painted image, the artist's source material becomes increasingly distorted and estranged from itself, and the line between objectivity and subjectivity is tenuous. These are hard compositions to know. Tampering with legacies of both abstraction and photorealism, Isaacs constructs a pictorial language in which fidelity coincides with doubt.

Throughout the exhibition, Isaacs exercises careful degradations of *trompe l'oeil*, presenting strange matrices of trinkets held together by tape or by gravity. Certain areas of these tableaux are painted with consuming precision, while other sections morph into an array of freer brushstrokes. A new series of four paintings draws from a single configuration of rhinestone grids, plastic studs and ribbon cast in purple light. Cropped and magnified, and in one instance, drained of pigment, these unsystematic systems project an atmosphere of disintegration. Layers of precise color shift within these geometries, interrupted by missing pieces and dotted with varied representations of light. Isaacs calibrates these stylistic gaps to mirror fluctuations in perceptual experience and to destabilize logics of value and attention.

The paintings here reflect obsession, but they are not glorifications—rather they build to discover unknown worlds in the banality of shiny trivia. Cast in stark and searching light, these near-still lives resemble excavations in progress.

Daniel Merritt

Kelsey Isaacs (b. 1994, Los Angeles) lives and works in New York City. Solo and two-person exhibitions include: *Clima*, Milan, IT (forthcoming, 2024); *Paris Internationale*, presentation with Theta, Paris, FR (2022); and *Chapter NY*, New York (2022). Recent group exhibitions include: *Tara Downs*, New York (2023); *Soft Opening*, London, UK (2023); *Venus Over Manhattan*, New York (2022); *Harkawik*, New York (2022); and *King's Leap*, New York (2021).