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A Review of In Praise of Shadows at Cassina Projects, New York



Installation view courtesy of ARTUNER at Cassina Projects

“... Yet for better or for worse we do love things that bear the marks of grime, soot, and weather, and we love the colours and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them.”

Stepping into the polished concrete, white walled interior of the Chelsea’s Cassina Projects, one wouldn’t expect these to be the words echoing in their mind upon entering the gallery space. And

famous essay, ‘In Praise of Shadows’.

Bringing together works by three very different artists – in terms of age, geography, and medium – this exhibition draws the viewer’s attention to the beauty of the understated. Tanizaki is not the only Japanese master whose work is evoked by this show: the poetics of empty space of the Hasegawa school of painting are as present as the essayist’s love letter to darkness.



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The aesthetics of Janis Avotins, Rebecca Salter, and Giuseppe Uncini enchanted me with a symphony of nuanced grays and muted hues. We are so used to seeing life and art tinged with the

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grain of the concrete, the waft of the lint-speckled canvas, the scratches on Japanese washi paper.

In the humming silence of the gallery, I suddenly become aware that these works are a kind of optical white noise. With a twist on Hasegawa's teachings, one realises that although they are seemingly full of 'empty space', these artworks disclose great detail upon contemplation. As Rebecca Salter remarked in a recent interview, "My work appears to be very grey and monotone but in fact, in many paintings, there is bright colour underneath, and it is only when your eyes have time to relax and settle, that the underlying comes through. So perhaps this is a plea to spend more time looking at art."



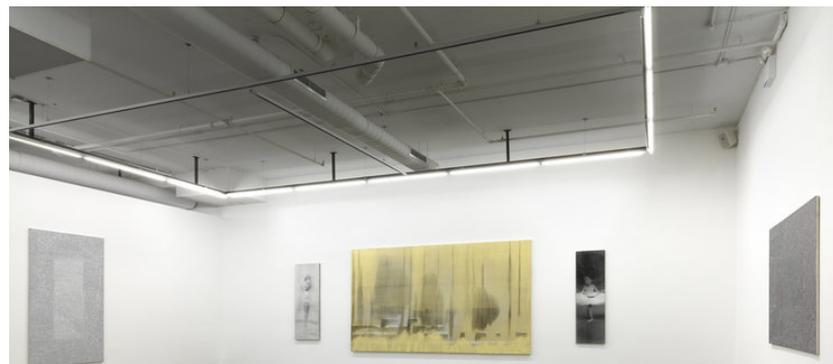
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large abstract landscape, hanging on the front wall at the far end of the room. The fluctuating darkness of this painting seems to allude to a world beyond our reach, delicately shaped by mist and shadow; it acts almost like a portal, drawing the viewer in and revealing slivers of what lies behind. Indeed, 'In Praise of Shadows' takes the viewer on an impossible journey through both geography and time: from Japan to the British Lake District, from the Soviet Union to 1970s Italy.

Walking through the rooms, I feel like I am following a fluidly choreographed path or a compelling narrative; my eyes follow the lines of Rebecca Salter's paintings as eagerly as they would parse the pages of a manuscript. The ink bleeding faintly in between her marks on canvas and paper makes me think of all those words left unspoken, where the artist chose to communicate through absence. Avotins' ballerinas dance with Uncini's wall-mounted concrete sculpture 'Shadow of Two Squares'; in the second room, the Latvian artist's vertical figures seem to be looking at their own reflections in a broken mirror, one made of dozens of shards fracturing their image in the tessellated works by Salter.





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When I reach the end of the exhibition I find myself as though in front of another portal: the second large abstract landscape by Avotins is almost incandescent. Two ancillary figures flank the painting and seem to be glancing simultaneously at the viewer and the landscape. For a moment, I feel like Alice Through the Looking Glass, and I wonder if I should give in, losing myself within the pulsating shadows of these artworks.

‘In Praise of Shadows’ is the fourth exhibition curated by ARTUNER at the Chelsea (NYC) gallery Cassina Projects. The London-based venture was founded by collector and patron Eugenio Re Rebaudengo to introduce an alternative mode of curating, displaying and selling art. Operating as an online platform as well as organising pop-up physical exhibitions internationally, ARTUNER is not tied to a specific venue, or the constraints of an art fair booth and develops site-specific curated projects with a wide variety of artists.

‘In Praise of Shadows’ is on view until 17 June 2017 at Cassina Projects, 508 W 24th St, New York, Tuesday to Saturday 10AM – 6PM.

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