

It's a Luxury to Look Back

A survey exhibition by Angela Miskis

Curatorial Statement by Teri Henderson

What a luxury it is to have the ability to look back. Reflection, stillness, and time are gifts in a society where we are consistently pushed to rush, hustle, and grind. The forced stillness of the global pandemic allowed much of the world to pause and reevaluate. Those lucky enough were able to find time to be still, weigh and consider what is and what wasn't necessary, and many of us emphasize the fleeting and precious value of time - time spent with loved ones, stillness with ourselves, and creating our artwork.

Angela Miskis' survey exhibition, *It's A Luxury to Look Back*, is a journey of empowerment, transferred from the artist's making of the show to the individual who gets to see and experience her artwork in person. The survey of works created steadily over the past decade is delicate, dark, emotional, vibrant, and brilliant. In this exhibition, we are privileged that Angela Miskis has manufactured a moment and space to mark time to marvel, wonder, and reflect on where we find ourselves and our emotions evident in her artwork. Reminding us that the opportunity to take time for ourselves and self-reflect is a luxury.

Anyone who has felt an emotion deeply will notice themselves in Miskis' work. As professor Tom Hunh writes, "*Angela provides us privileged access to the intimate relationship between her thinking about her work and their work.*" The artist infuses each artwork with a radical vulnerability, selflessly creating a space for her to see herself and the viewer to locate familiarity within her paintings.

A core tenant of Miskis' art practice is finding balance. She is talented at balancing color, textures, materials, and techniques into cohesive compositions that fill the surface, calling the viewer to spend time looking at all the layers forming the artwork.

Miskis' vibrant and emotional works reflect her journey growing up in America away from her roots in Ecuador and as the only child of a single parent battling undiagnosed mental illness. For Miskis creating art has always been about freedom. Freedom to choose from the good and the bad life has thrown at her - owning the narrative of her life circumstances and turning them into empowering symbols of liberty and self-resilience.

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Angela Miskis has never once stopped making art. After a residency in Leipzig, Germany, in 2014, she went on a solo pilgrimage to see her favorite paintings in Europe. During that focused solitude and observation period, Miskis first purchased an A5 journal for recording her travels. After completing her travel journal, Miskis recognized the value of focusing and expanding on a single theme per journal, which led her to explore other subjects using the diary format. In 2015, after a few months of being back in New York, the *Subway Journal* series was born.

Miskis drew people she would witness on subways in intricate and delicate drawings in shades of black and white. She was compelled to mark these moments of affection as a way to partake in family moments that she is unable to enjoy because of her distance away from her home country. Years later, she would enlist a friend based in Finland to mail her more of the notebooks for future drawings, which would eventually generate the work in her *Home Journal* series in 2016.

Like time, another intangible luxury is proximity and the opportunity to experience work in real life in physical spaces again. For so long, we could not be in galleries and museums. Artists, writers, and thinkers kept making artwork throughout pandemic isolation, and now we have the privilege of revisiting galleries. As her professor, Tom Huhn, wrote so beautifully,

"It's as if this first long odyssey of Angela's painting career has delivered her just in time to the public place where we now meet her. She and her paintings bring us joy, color, movement and life, composed in a spectacular balance that greets and affirms us precisely as we find ourselves: enlarged and together."

Angela's brilliant work brings us together. Physically and emotionally, we can reconcile and reconvene before her artwork. Her abstract works, composed of collages, paintings, and drawings, are an elegant amalgamation of a profoundly intuitive and brilliant individual.

Miskis' paintings communicate her ancestry. For example, in *Portrait of Fabric Collage #8*, 2014, the artist paints a scrap of fabric that her grandfather, a tailor, passed down. Her grandfather was the first person Miskis knew had made a livelihood out of their creative work, and his influence shows up throughout her choice of materials and techniques.

In *Earnest*, 2014, made of cut-and-pasted fabric and recycled paintings, Miskis uses the same scrap fabric from her grandfather and collages it into the work. I see *Earnest* and many common threads from Miskis' work in her contemporary painting *Nine Years to Say Goodbye*, 2022. The

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horizontal image mixes tempera, printer ink, pencil, colored pencils, and paint markers on paper. *Nine Years to Say Goodbye* is a broad and expansive visual sweep with multiple bodies depicted in a row against a sea of tan and blue.

The figures in *Nine Years to Say Goodbye* originate from a stencil of the artist's body, a practice she has finetuned over her career. In 2019 Miskis started working with the idea of creating stencils from recycled packaging materials that she digitized. This was a way for Miskis to think about recycling without using the original object - expanding the possibility of working with recycled materials in an updated manner - using recycled objects not as material where they can only have one more life but rather as stencils that can be remixed into multiple variations. For example, the painting *Heavy Is the Weight (Ups And Downs)*, 2018, shows various shapes in a quilt-like collage painted in oils. Some of those exact shapes appear in *Closer and Closer*, 2019, and *Sediments (Memories)*, 2019. More recently, the same round shape is used in an expanded context in the study *Protect Me From The Eyes (2021)*.

Every painting created from 2021 to 2022 responds and echoes the works completed in 2014 and before. With each remix and reuse, Miskis is not only processing her emotions but carrying a thread of her history with her into new artwork. The making of her work is an act of reinvention and empowerment; the creation of her paintings allows the artist to build pieces that are layered with affirmation and self-assurance. *It's a Luxury to Look Back* echoes the triumph of actively healing in flux from past difficult experiences, an exhibition of work that heals herself and others.

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