

# whitewall

ART



## Holly Coulis Shows Us How to Look Closer

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There are rewards for those who choose to look at something closely. Sustained attention on the curvature of a line, the distribution and balance of color on a particular plane, or the abstraction of otherwise ordinary, quotidian forms, can initiate a progression of thought and feeling that is not available from a cursory glance. Scrutinizing a visual form is, of course, what anchors the study of art history, but this act of concentrated observation is especially rewarding when it is guided by the hands of an artist.

In “Eyes and You” at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery in New York, Holly Coulis employs her characteristic vocabulary to focus our attention on particular corners of her still-life compositions and their inherent complexities. Coulis’s familiar still lifes—often populated with traces of daily life including bowls, fruits, vases, and the occasional outline of a feline—are rendered using bright, contrasting shades and a recognizable, flattened style. Her practice of abstracting intimate landscapes of interior life already involves a collapsing of space, but here Coulis flattens our field of vision even further by purposefully moving us closer to her canvas.

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It is almost as if we have shrunk, or her paintings have grown; it is akin to a film scene that, from a topographic perspective, zooms in on the granular detail of an organic form or on the organized bustle of a large city.

Coulis focuses our attention to the points where forms intersect or overlap, highlighting the complexities and tensions in those interactions. In *Before You* (2021) and *After You* (2021), sensuous outlines divorced from recognizable forms invite us to contemplate the consequences of interaction and wonder what—or who—those intersecting forms might be. Other works, such as *Lake Eyes* (2021) or *Ocean Eyes* (2021), employ Coulis's characteristic motifs of oranges and lemons, but layer them into physical impossibilities. Objects that were previously arranged meticulously on a kitchen table are now flattened into the same space, challenging notions of spatial relationships. Absent from these paintings are the firm outlines that often border the canvas itself; instead, they lay outside of the frame, allowing us to concentrate on the particularities of line and color in a focused field of vision.

This exercise in abstraction is accompanied by traces of the artist's hand. Light brushstrokes outline the abstracted forms and break the opacity typical of Coulis's paintings by adding slivers of



Installation view of Holly Coulis's "Eyes and You" [2022] at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

tonality. Evidence of Coulis's hand adds depth to her characteristic use of flatness and highlights the tactility of the paintings as objects themselves. It is also a comfort, in a way, to see markings from the painter herself: they add to this feeling of being guided in this exercise of observation, of being taught to look closer.

The exhibition also includes three sculptural works, a continuation of the artist's exploration of three-dimensionality that began with her last show at the gallery. Despite this, the works share a genealogy with her paintings (and are, in fact, titled *Sleeping Painting*, *Sitting Painting*, and *Standing Painting*) in that they are focused on the connecting points of abstracted forms. Triangular bases give way to intersecting shapes that mirror the motifs in the paintings. With these works, Coulis advances her study of abstraction by bringing such forms into our immediate space, confronting us with the paradox of a sculptural rendering of visual flatness. The inherent abstraction of everyday forms and the potentiality of interaction are the objects of Coulis's attention and, by sharpening our vision and probing us to contemplate the ensuing abstractions, they become ours as well.



Holly Coulis, "Before You," 2021, oil on linen, 18 x 20 inches, courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.