Barcena, Bryan. “Precious Moments in the Back Room: Exhibitions of Quiet Pleasure in LA.” Artforum (October 24, 2026) [ill.] [online]

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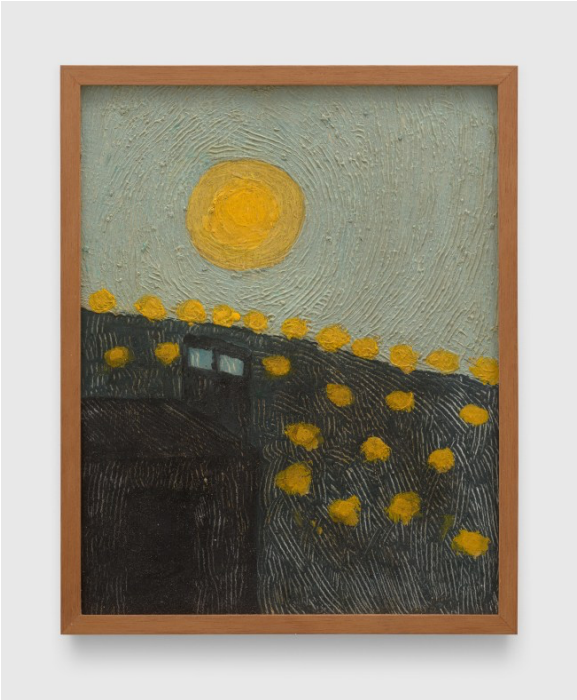
PRECIOUS MOMENTS IN THE BACK ROOM: EXHIBITIONS OF QUIET PLEASURE IN LA

Brazilian landscapes, beige still lifes, dollhouse cutouts, and whispy dreamscapes prove that subtlety can speak volumes



Installation view of "Milano Chow: Fantasy Street." Courtesy of Hollyhock House. Photo by Joshua White.

“I WANT THAT FOR MY HOUSE.” This is a category that I apply to a great deal of the art I’ve been seeing around Los Angeles galleries. Art that “I want in my house” relates to what I want to see more of in the world; the type of art that I can enjoy and commune with at my leisure in the privacy of my own home; an art that affects me in surprising and sensuous ways, only gently confounding the intellect. Over the past few weeks, I was fortunate enough to encounter several backroom exhibitions that offered this kind of rarefied aesthetic experience.



Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, *Sem título (Untitled)*, 1980. Courtesy David Zwirner

At David Zwirner, an oil by Brazilian Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato (1900–1990) made me swoon. These precious paintings in unassuming wooden frames, made between 1970 and 1988—most of which seemed roughly the size of a chessboard—evoked a feeling of Continental nostalgia, as if they traveled here on a turn-of-the-nineteenth-century ocean liner, stowed at the bottom of a steamer trunk. This compact presentation features twelve landscapes, each one rendered with simple shapes and outlines in primary and secondary colors. In one work we find a wobbly sun set low across a black landscape, embellished with cheery daubs of yellow; in another is a close-up view of a bird-of-paradise, its fleshy petals depicted in sumptuous shades of pink, green, and blue; and in a beachfront scene are unfussy canoe forms, occupied by figures that are just barely delineated, floating in a body of grisaille water. Lorenzato seems to paint with a fork rather than a brush—arrangements of equally spaced ridges or ribs texture the artist's tableaux, calling to mind van Gogh, but less showy.

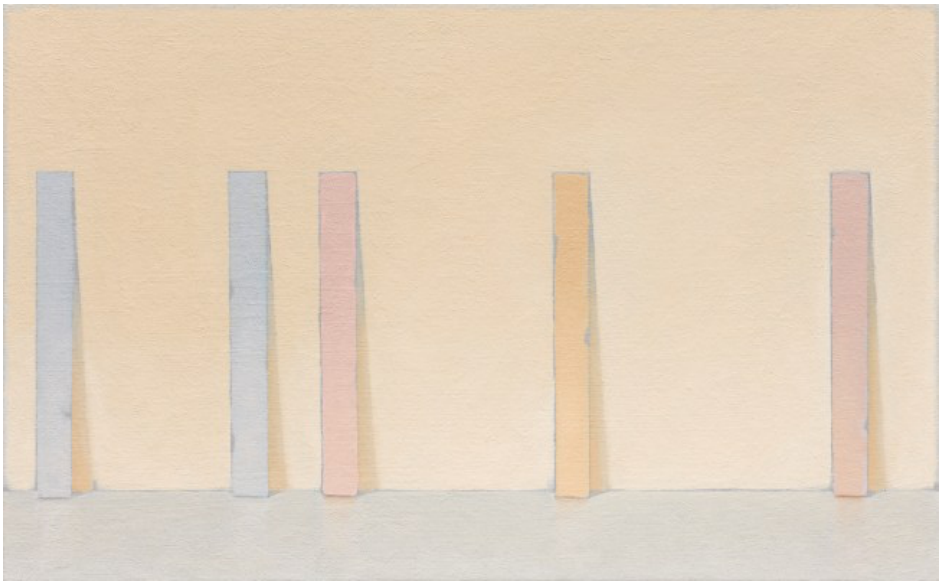


Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, *Sem título (Untitled)*, 1985. Courtesy David Zwirner

As part of the wave of New York galleries that set up shop in LA between 2010 and 2025, Karma, in West Hollywood, got the best house. Á la Goldilocks, the gallery secured a not too big, not too small home that they divided into perfectly proportioned rooms, with plenty of space for its impressive selection of books. In the smaller gallery was a tight little exhibition of modestly scaled paintings by another (and younger) Brazilian artist, Felipe Suzuki. The untitled works, all oil-on-canvas mounted on wood and made this year, featured monastically spare tableaux that recall the still lifes of Giorgio Morandi, but executed in a sun-bleached, *Golden Girls*–style palette. In one, a set of periwinkle, pink, and apricot planks resembling blanched John McCrackens are arranged vertically against a beige wall that stands atop a wispy gray floor. In another, a taupe tablecloth floats against a background that is nearly the exact same hue. The commitment to color and form here is so breathy and detached that it feels like these works might just melt into thin air. There is a gnomic or mystic quality to these images, perhaps most exemplified by the painting depicting a levitating stick of burning incense, its smoky plume interrupting the equilibrium of the two evenly spaced milky-blue and -red squares set behind it. Many might see these works as jejune trifles, but I found their barely-there mien endearing—quiet painting to the extreme, these are silent things that delight in their restraint.



Felipe Suzuki, *Untitled*, 2026. Courtesy Karma



Felipe Suzuki, *Untitled*, 2026. Courtesy Karma

At the Hollyhock House in Barnsdall Art Park—a place that I wish was *my* home—was a darling show by Milano Chow, organized by Cole Akers. The pieces were thoughtfully arranged in a tiny back gallery originally designed to be a child's bedroom. Chow has been an LA fixture for some time—her quiet and slyly subversive black-and-white works always punch above their weight. The artist's oeuvre mainly comprises modestly sized paper cutouts drawn in pencil, ink, and acrylic, which often depict the architectural facades, interiors, and rather surreal decor of Victorian, Edwardian, or American colonial buildings (think window sashes, pediments, capitals, entablatures, and so on). The detailing is exquisite, akin to the pleasure one experiences when peering into a well-

crafted dollhouse. Figures can often be seen in the windows, sneaking across arcades or peeking out of doorways. The artist's muted palette, straightforward perspective, and solemn mystery deliver a sense of melancholy that belies the works' toylike presentation. Here at Hollyhock, the drawings were hung on dark pink and dark mahogany wood accented walls, hung on a stone mantel, up against the doors of a wooden closet, and installed on sumptuously upholstered room dividers. A small, maquette-like paper sculpture sat on a pedestal in the corner of the room, bringing Chow's world into the third dimension, but ever so slightly. The piece made me think of a children's pop-up book that had been drained of all color—my kind of domestic bliss.



Milano Chow, *Exterior (Open Door)*, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles

At Regen Projects is Elliott Hundley's maximalist (yet somehow Minimalist in relation to his last presentation there) show of paintings, sculptures, and textiles— is this month's star attraction. But in Regen's two back galleries is an exhibition that should not be missed. Like a musical composition in minor keys, the art of Silke Otto-Knapp (1970–2022) does little to bring attention to itself. Her languid scenes of dancers and stage sets seemingly materialize out of liquescent washes of gray and black acrylic, appearing like a memory of a dream. In these paintings we might see a faint recollection of a room's architecture; the suggestion of a landscape's topography; the ghostly contours of a

dancer's body. Yet the works are not vague. Otto-Knapp possessed a singular visual vocabulary, which she masterfully deployed to flesh out her shadowy realm. Because of their uncharacteristically small size, the selection of works here is more distilled and condensed. Her larger compositions, which often take the form of folding screens, are indeed impressive. But the shrunken versions of those pieces—such as *Study for Scenery and Frontis piece*, 2017—are the works that I want to live with and slowly pore over, away from all distractions. *Study* is a moody gray landscape that stretches across five roughly fourteen-by-eleven-inch canvases featuring islands, clouds, and a dreary sun. A strange light unevenly illuminates certain parts of the composition. Contrasting against all of this in the rightmost panel is a flatter, more cartoonlike landscape, which is bordered on one side by a wavy diamond motif. As my eyes moved across the canvases, the work coalesced into an extraordinary gestalt, bringing differing modes of representation into harmony.

Now, what kind of *very* extended payment plan can I dream up to take this beauty home?



Silke Otto-Knapp, *Study for Scenery and Frontis piece*, 2017. © The Estate of Silke Otto-Knapp, courtesy Regen Projects

REGEN PROJECTS



Silke Otto-Knapp, *Tilting*, 2016. © The Estate of Silke Otto-Knapp, courtesy Regen Projects