

Meliksetian MB Briggs

Contemporary
Art Review

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Alex Heilbron at Meliksetian | Briggs

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Text by Matt Stromberg



Alex Heilbron, *Faithful Reflection* (2019).
Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 54 x 1.25 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist and Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles.
Photo: Evan Bedford / Max Cleary.

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The five paintings in Alex Heilbron's solo show *Time and Intent* manifest a tension between the artist's hand and the grid, between spontaneity and premeditation. They draw on a grab bag of references, from early modernist abstraction to seriality to the Pattern and Decoration movement, conjuring flamboyant wallpaper through an overlay of different patterns. Despite these incongruous referents, Heilbron unites each work, and the entire show, with consistent visual refrains that read like an invented language— unfamiliar, but inviting.

Each five-foot-tall work is structured by a grid—the modernist staple of order and clarity— which Heilbron plays with and subverts. In *We Are Aspiring* (2020), a grid of yellow flowers overlays a central image of two bright orange female figures, their color pushing them to the surface, flipping figure and ground. A white profile of a pony-tailed head floats over the midsection of each figure, resembling emojis in their flat, stylized execution, but—unlike standard emojis—each form differs ever-so-slightly from its counterpart. Throughout the painting, Heilbron compresses portraiture and pattern, entangling the universal with the specific and flattening pictorial hierarchies.

The grid of matte blue squares in *Faithful Reflection* (2019) is jarringly interrupted by diagonal textured purple swaths. Two yellow-eyed, generic female faces emerge from the pattern like the spectral woman caught inside garish yellow wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's iconic 1892 story. Also stuck within the grid are a pair of orange female silhouettes, each above the number "20", one rotated 180 degrees from the other, in

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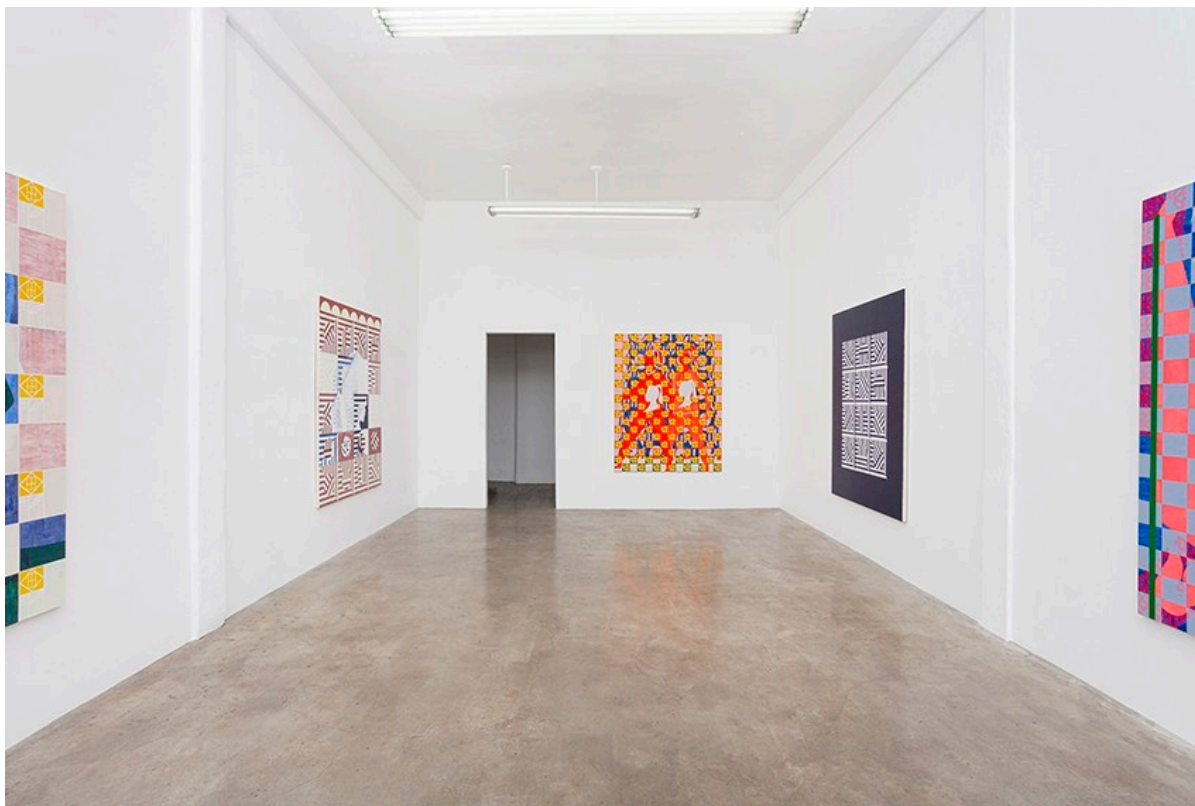
the style of a playing card, a clever hint at the kind of visual games Heilbron is setting up. Women are often the subject in Heilbron's paintings, but they are not objectified. She empties their forms of content, allowing them to hover between symbol and depiction, thwarting any attempt at voyeurism.

In contrast to the vibrant, layered playfulness of *Faithful Reflection, Faithful Mirror* (2019) is characterized by spare geometry. On a ground of deep blue, a grid of 12 squares is divided diagonally into triangles composed of vertical and horizontal white and blue stripes. In the center of each square is a circle, made up of the same vertical and horizontal lines, this time jutting out at different angles, creating visual cacophony and forcing our eyes to bounce around the canvas like a pachinko ball. Heilbron has painted a few stripes a slightly different shade of blue, breaking up the chromatic monotony, and subtly asserting her authorial subjectivity.

With inspiration from various points in the history of 20th-century abstraction, Alex Heilbron both honors and challenges the grid, establishing a visual order only to superimpose competing systems, thwarting its confines. The results can be disorienting, but she always offers a way out. Her visual language of subdivided squares, circles, flowers, and female figures send our eye through each canvas and to the next, offering markers to guide us without dictating the path. Balancing ambiguity with purpose, she destabilizes a singular viewpoint, offering instead a dynamic field of possibilities.

Alex Heilbron: Time and Intent runs from January 23–March 27, 2021 at Meliksetian I Briggs (313 N. Fairfax Ave., West Hollywood, CA 90036).

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Alex Heilbron, *We Are Aspiring* (detail) (2020).

Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 54 x 1.25 inches.

Image courtesy of the artist and Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles. Photo: Evan Bedford.