

Chloe Wise Continues Her Meteoric Rise with a Striking New Show at Almine Rech Gallery

During COVID-19, the artist turned to everyday things around her, including grocery items, to convey a 'glorified nothingness'

March 15, 2021
Thomas High



Chloe Wise - Thank You For The Nice Fire at Almine Rech Gallery PHOTO: DAN BRADICA

Many masterpieces are created during times of catastrophe and unrest. In the case of Chloe Wise, they feature her loved ones and a growing fascination with food. Chandeliers and sconces made to look like romaine lettuce drip with caesar dressing, while croutons dot their surface. Paintings depicting intertwined hands signal a longing for touch and wide grins proclaim gritted teeth shown in the face of this year.

On the Upper East Side, a selection of these new works are now on view in the Montreal-born artist's third solo show "Thank you for the Nice Nice Fire" at Almine Rech Gallery. In preparing for the exhibition, Wise faced new challenges previously unaccustomed to in her process. "Painting friends has been the obvious choice for me—born from a combination of my love for them and their proximity and availability for image-making," she tells Galerie. "This time was different because I was unable to get friends together and stage them in my studio as I usually do." The artist instead spent time scrolling through her archive and hard drives—old photographs or source material from previous years—to "reexamine those images in a way that actually felt relevant to how we have renegotiated community over the last year." In some cases, friends were able to send self-portraits for the artist to work from, too.

Further diving into the sources of her inspiration, she explains, "The main thought I had, in creating this body of work, was the cognitive dissonance that is required for survival during times of crisis. To be constantly crying would be of no use. To feel outrage and sadness is human, but it is equally within our human nature to trudge along, fake a smile, do one's best to get by."

As crucial as survival is connection. “During isolation, we still find ways to be together, albeit in a stunted or fragmented sense, whether that’s online or at a distance, or with fabric or plastic acting as a barrier,” she says, noting that not all obstacles are bad ones. “Sometimes I feel as though arbitrary limits are a fruitful way to force innovation, as opposed to the complacency born from limitless availability.” Connecting these restraints to the subject matter of her work, Wise furthers, “I ended up using what I had around me, both in terms of images and subject matter, and I chose foods that represent a sort of glorified nothingness; lettuce, butter, bottled water... the experience felt like an exercise in actually working with what you already have, as opposed to the aspirational thinking I was (and we were) used to.”

Wise passed the days of quarantine in her East Village studio and apartment accompanied by her two Siamese cats Pluto and Hans. “I credit my cats with keeping me sane, if I am, in fact, sane, which I suppose remains a question of how you define the word... I digress... My cats are my best friends, and I am constantly in awe of their snuggliness and the visionary nature of their cuddling poses and stretch formation...I credit them for giving me even more reason to stay home and work for days on end without leaving.”

Presenting a lens into the artist’s life since COVID-19 started, almost one year ago, it is a refreshing moment of clarity and an exercise in finding the beauty in whatever surrounds you. Running concurrently, Wise presents works in “Fantasy America” at The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, on view through August 30, 2021.