ALMINE RECH

The Wall: Cece Philips

Apr 23 — Jun 7, 2025 | Brussels

Cece Philips' paintings are an ode to looking and being looked at. Her work is part of a long-standing tradition of depicting interiors, from the domestic scenes of the Dutch Golden Age to Félix Vallotton. Full of windows and doors, her work hides as much as it reveals, hinting at a story but leaving the viewer the pleasure of filling in the details. Using light to suggest mood and narrative, her paintings glow with the sublime loneliness of Hopper, reworked with a Woolfian sensibility.

Philips has a cerebral approach to painting. Her process often begins through an engagement with her many influences, rooting her work in art history, the work of contemporary artists, film, archival material, literature, and criticism. This assembly of works is the product of several months of exploration without a specific goal, an inventory of the artist's mind. Philips found a certain freedom in working without a defined framework- with all the possibilities of wandering somewhere you've only been before with a specific destination in mind. Working in an increasingly instinctive way, surprises began to emerge.

Above all, these works explore solitude, whether chosen or imposed. *Nourishing Loneliness* taps into the intrigue of the everyday. A figure pulls back a curtain, theatrically revealing six small vignettes of life, inviting us to be voyeurs. Featuring windows within windows, the painting is a Russian doll, demanding long contemplation. The artist uses her palette to inform the emotional content of the scene, as well as a juxtaposition of natural and artificial light. In *The Balcony* we are once again looking out into an anonymous city, wondering what could be happening behind each glimmering window. Are the three figures looking into the windows, or at each other? The artist does not see these paintings as portraits, Philips eschews the purely representational, reaching for composite figures she arranges like characters acting out a scene.

In *Quiet Interior* the figure faces us. Following her gaze, we ask ourselves if she is alone. Philips often plumbs the psychological depths of who we are when we're alone, paying particular attention to women in moments of solitude, a paradoxical state described by John Berger: "A woman must constantly watch herself. She is almost constantly accompanied by her own image of herself." Modern life further complicates this question- in the digital age, when we could always be potentially perceived by someone- if not by ourselves- through a front-facing camera, are we ever truly alone?

Moving from the solitude to the communal, *After Curtain Call* brings us inside a theatre. The work captures the breathless seconds at the end of a show, the curtain has fallen, the house lights flicker on, and the audience stirs back to life, as if awakened from a dream. Philips plays with textural effects, layering liquin so as to hide and reveal certain details, capturing the fallibility of perspective. We are invited to step closer, to look from a new angle. Theatre has become a recent inspiration for the artist. The form, simultaneously intimate and collective, grants a certain level of voyeurism so central to Philips' artistic imagination. A theatre audience can relish in the act of looking without scruples, a privilege also available when interacting with a painting. Philips' work beckons the viewer to come closer and peer in, like walking through a city at night, tempted by the glowing apartments and the possibilities of life they each contain.

— Louisa Mahoney, Researcher