Livingetc

I Went to the Main Frieze Week Events So You Don't Have to — 3 Rising Trends Show Art and Decor Grappling With the Present

Enjoy a behind-the-scenes look at PAD, Frieze London, and more, and take away scoops like one of its insiders, all on us



By Gilda Bruno | Published yesterday In Features



In the picture: artist Dale Lewis's *The Strawberry Thief* (2025), as seen in the Frieze London 2026, home-inspired booth of local gallery Edel Assanti.

(Image credit: Gilda Bruno. Courtesy of Dale Lewis and Edel Assanti)

Frieze Week isn't the kind of city-wide event to leave the public short of spectacle, but I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to say that PAD and Frieze London 2026 and satellite events like hotel-based fringe fair Minor Attractions had a rather unsettling atmosphere this year.

Open through Sunday, October 18, the latest edition of Frieze London presents 172 global galleries across five sections, including the emerging, young international platform and experimental programming-dedicated *Focus*, the peer-nominated

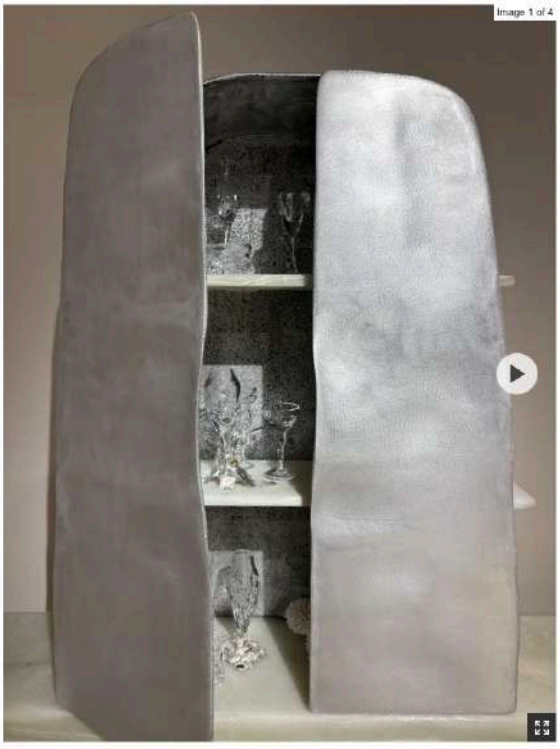
Artist-to-Artist, and newcomer *The Code Universe*, an invitational curated wing organized by Carol Yinghua Lu with an eye to mass culture, societal transformation, and post-digital image economy. Not far from Regent's Park, home to Frieze London, Frieze Masters, and Frieze Sculpture, PAD London 2026 (through October 18) transforms Berkeley Square into a walk-through jewelry box through premium collectible design and decorative arts. Whether at either location or over at Minor Attractions, whose fourth edition — closing today — reunites 75 galleries, publishers, and cultural organizations at Fitzrovia's hip hotel reservation The Newman, makers and artists' concern with the present will follow you anywhere on your Frieze Week 2026 trail.

From eerie androids springing out of wardrobes and carved-out, disembodied, sculptural limbs standing in for home accessories — reminders of our increasingly screen-bounded way of living — to melty furnishings echoing the ecological transformations brought about by the climate crisis, and a more daring, cut-out way to experiment with surfaces and materials, the coolest booths on our radar reframe decorative interior accents as a tongue-in-cheek exercise in exorcising an uncertain present, surreal, at times humorous, and yet uncompromisingly forward-thinking.

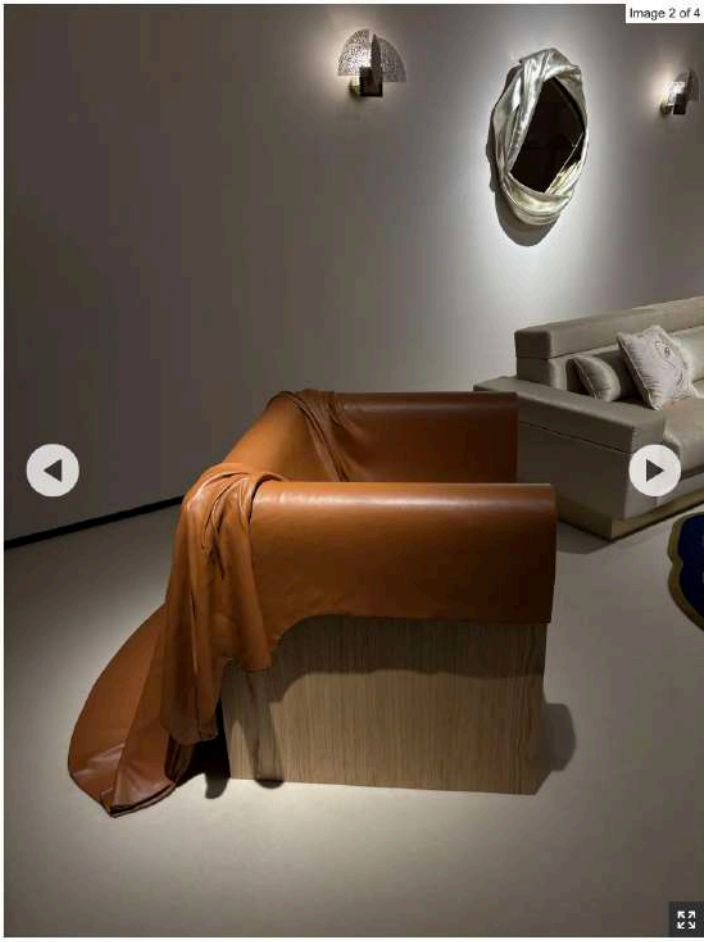
Here for the hospitality side of things? See where top gallerists and curators eat and drink during Frieze Week.

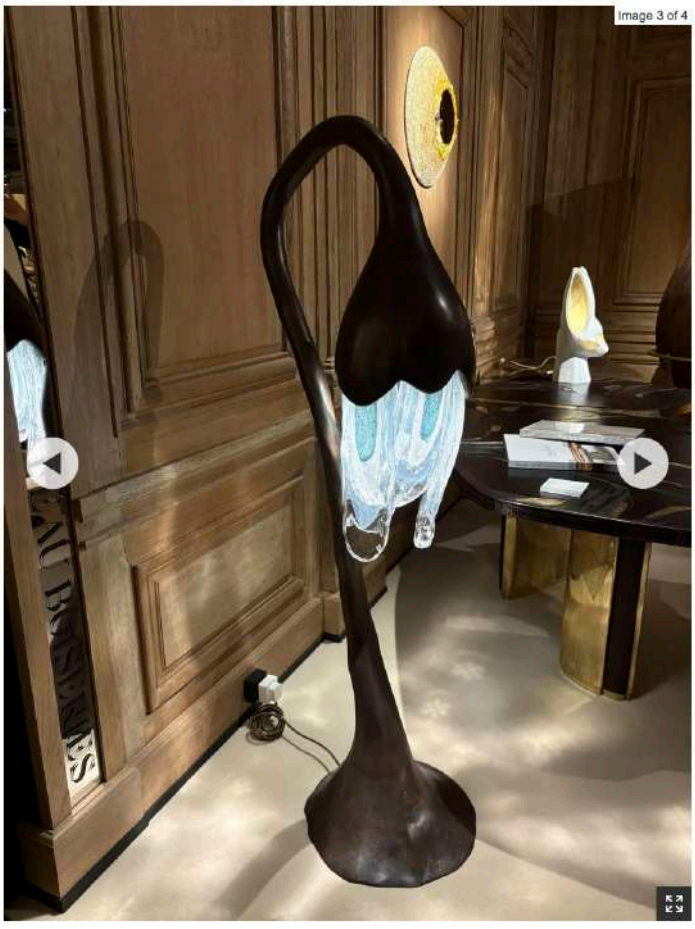
THE MOOD

MOLTEN MODERNISM ↔ NOUVEAU ICE AGE



(Image credit: Gilda Bruno. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Boketto)


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A detail of Moulay Hafid Sdikiene's *VAULT Cabinet* (2026), a central piece of the Halocline series debuted at Galerie Boketto's booth during PAD London 2026. Part of a showcase exploring the concept of density through transparency, reflection, and non-repetition, the cabinet couples cool, industrial reclaimed aluminium with heavily veined, translucent jade onyx, evoking a timeless frozen landscape suspended between the contemporary and the primitive.

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Image credit: COMPLETEDWORKS and Sessions Arts Club

The melty / frosty moments extends to one of Frieze London 2026's most exciting collaboration: a meeting between London's ultimate artsy restaurant, Sessions Arts Club, and cult design and jewelry brand COMPLETEDWORKS. For the occasion, the two have created a custom-designed and hand-embroidered T-shirt designed in response to a series of sunset paintings by Sessions Arts Club and Cabin Studio founder Jonny Gent, with COMPLETEDWORKS stepping in to envision the official uniform for the third iteration of the restaurant's immersive installation, *Pilgrimage*.



Image credit: COMPLETEDWORKS and Sessions Arts Club

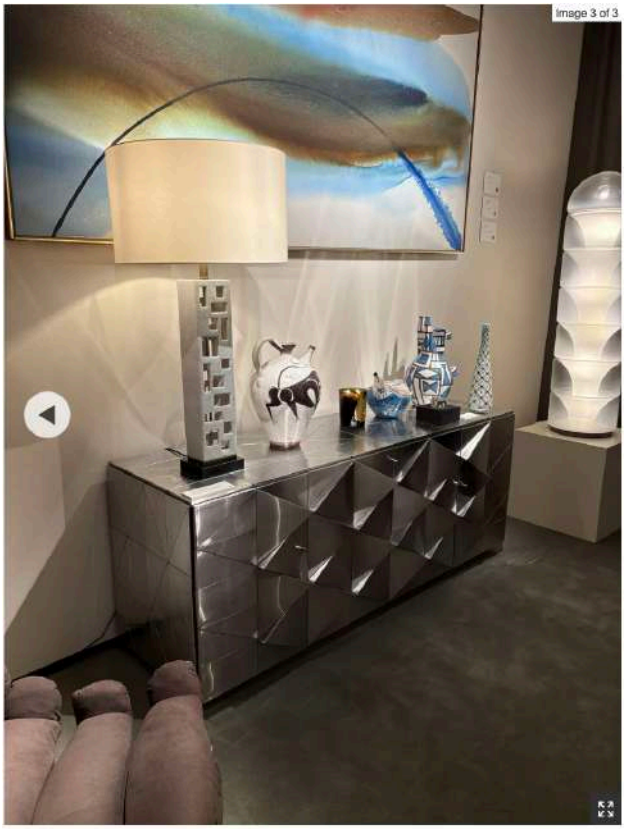
Also on view at Frieze London 2026 is a curation of COMPLETEDWORKS recycled glassware from their homeware collection in tones that evoke sunrises and sunsets, and wound vases that convey the physical sensation of a journey. "These will be accompanied by a selection of 'encountered objects', including sterling silver salad servers, trinket boxes and ceramic display cushions, which playfully explore ideas of rest, respite, transience, and permanence," explained the brand.

FRACTURED FURNITURE FOR A FRACTURED WORLD



(Image credit: Gilda Bruno)





The room I liked most from Minor Attractions' takeover of the Newman included gallery JOEY RAMONE's presentation of an installation by artists Linhuei Chen and Kiki Petratou: a bed cover entirely crafted from stitched-together tote bags, turning each piece from a standalone accessory into a colorful quilt.

Walking through PAD London 2026, I was surprised to find a widespread, almost "broken" or patched-together upcycled aesthetic cutting through the fair. This raw, fragmented look brought an unexpected, almost grungy edge to exhibitions that otherwise featured many historical and traditional pieces. It might be just me, but these fractured surfaces felt like an indirect reflection of a growingly fractured world, while still managing to fulfill the core functions of aesthetics, comfort, and daily practicality. Beyond mere metaphor, this trend directly spoke to the values of sustainable design practices and raw material experimentation, proving that contemporary furniture must be as conceptually layered and multifaceted as it is functional. Ultimately, these pieces fight against traditional decorative rules by daring to, quite literally, break through. And boy did they succeed.

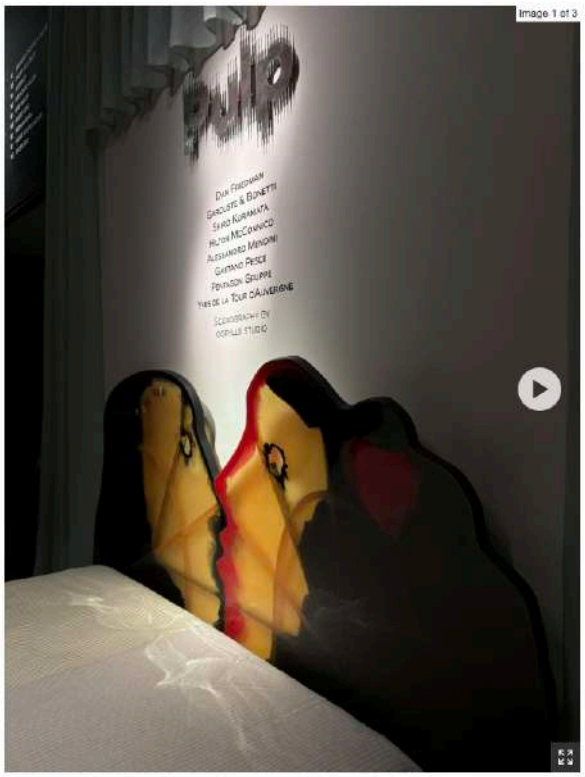


A detail of Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's Familiar Sun (II) (2026), a mixed-media artwork combining jacquard tapestry, wool, cotton, silk, and lurex, inviting viewers to examine memory not as a fixed historical record, but as a fractured space shaped by gaps, silences, and ruptures.

(Image credit: Gilda Bruno. Courtesy of the artist and Kerlin Gallery)

THE DECORATIVE TWIST

THE BODY IS THE MESSAGE



(Image credit: Gilda Bruno)

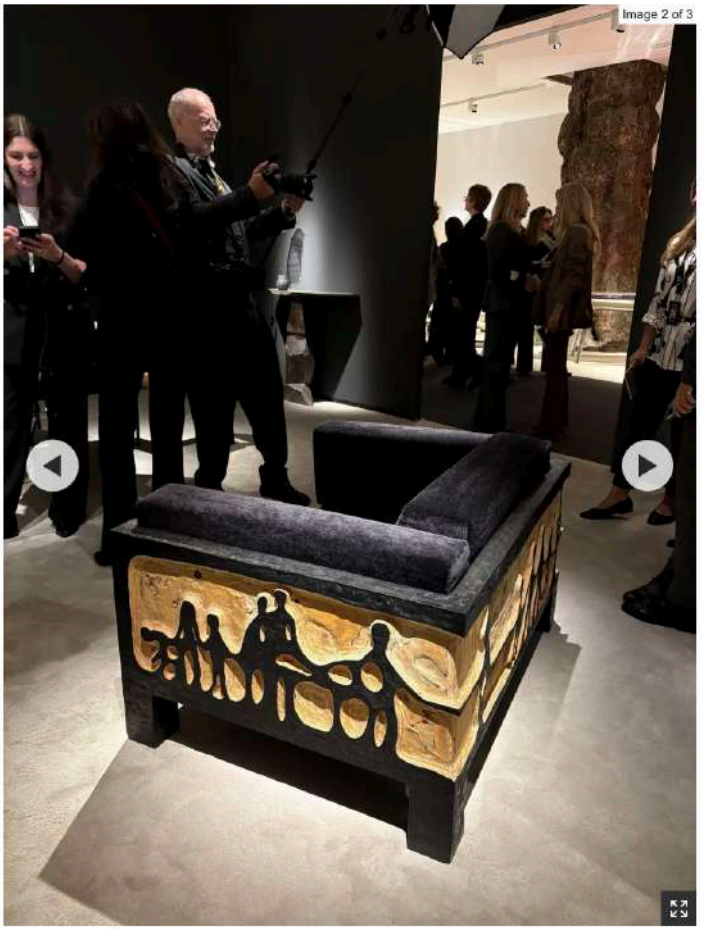

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Paris-based gallery Pulp has been a constant highlight on my PAD London lists since I joined Livingetc a couple of years back. Their 2026 booth was heralded by cult designer Gaetano Pesce's whimsically beautiful *Nobody's Perfect* bed (2002), cast from resin, metal, and polychrome plastic components into a sculptural ode to love and its contrasting facets. Rather than relying on rigid modern uniformity, the design embraces "mass-customization" through its hand-poured process, allowing for unpredictable variations that beautifully embody the late designer's belief in "the impossibility of truly perfect design".

In an increasingly digital age, the body, it seems, has never been more central for the practice of artists and designers alike. I have seen it at Minor Attractions and PAD London 2026, where the human form has been fragmented, stylized, and even motorized to the most contrasting effects, though the appearances I appreciated most of it were the ones that — whether through texture, the rendition of an embrace, or the hint of a smile — managed to remind me what life is all about. And in the positive sense, for once. At Frieze London 2026, meanwhile, the presence of bodies went hand in hand with some kind of absence: parts of their silhouettes had been removed, or were totally missing, leaving the body to float more like an abstract form than a sentient thing. Elsewhere again, the state of constant fatigue and disconnectedness many are lamenting nowadays was made manifest. In both cases, one thing is for certain: even in our mediated era, the body — caught present to his senses or asleep, undiscussed protagonist or portrayed unaware — remains the strongest message.

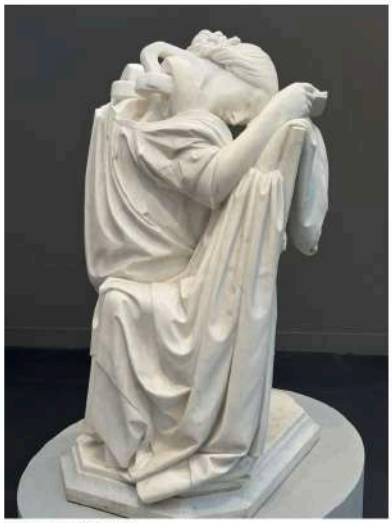


Image credit: Gilda Bruno

Jonathan Owen's *Untitled* (2026) sculpture, shown by Ingleby Gallery at Frieze London 2026, stuck with me because of the 360-degree, slowly revealing experience it provides. From the front, it frames the quiet serenity of a 19th-century female figure resting her head over an open book, but walking around it presents you with a whole different story. The loose, interlocking marble links Owen managed to re-carve on her neck and spine forced the statue's head to collapse forward in what feels like a critique of modern exhaustion.



Image credit: Gilda Bruno

Attachment and absence coexist in this mixed-media, collaged photographic work by artist Joanna Piotrowska, exhibited as part of Phillida Reid's Frieze London 2026 booth. The 2024 print, showing a profile photograph of Piotrowska over a family photograph her father took of her mother, was sold for €24,000 to Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, and speaks to the dynamics of intimacy, memory, and psychological depth within domestic relationships.



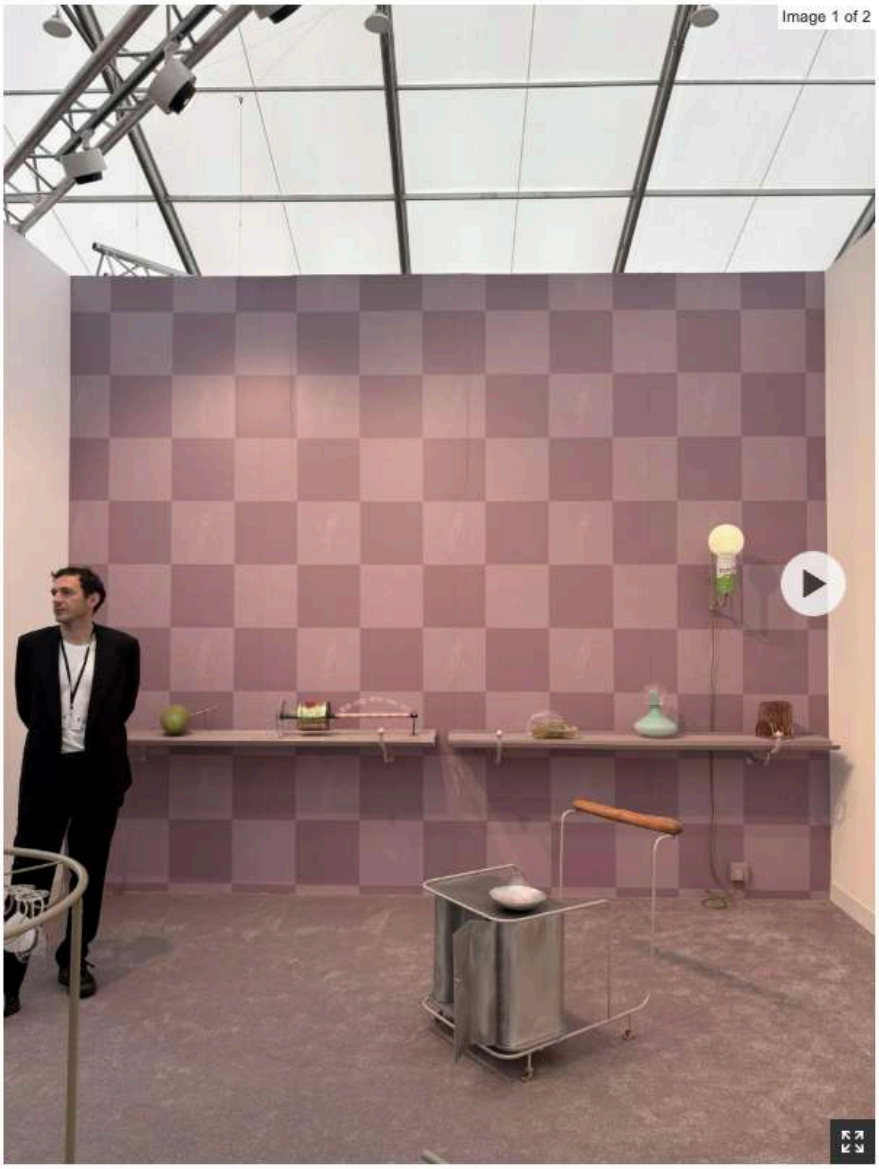
Image credit: Gilda Bruno

Eusung Lee's aluminium sculpture *Radio Woman (reconstruction)*, brought by Seoul's CYLINDER at Frieze London 2026, made me think about how isolated and empty so many of us feel today. Seeing the lone body cast in separate pieces on a cold scaffolding frame mirrors the grind of the cost-of-living crisis — where we are forced to keep performing just to get by, yet feel increasingly unable to connect with ourselves and others.

DO THE (EXTRA)ORDINARY

As numerous booths at PAD, Minor Attractions, and Frieze London 2026 portrayed today's reality as increasingly mechanized, a place where the most genuine ties and ways of spending time feel endangered by the metaverse and the rise of AI, others retreated to the comfort of what we know best: the simplest actions, from reading and painting in bed to sketching on a desk, discarded objects of little value as both traces and proof of our physical passage despite our chronically online lives, and the inexplicable beauty of a messy bookshelf.

Perhaps, then, in the absence of better alternatives, the answer to coping with an uncertain presence lies in doing — and making — the ordinary 'extra'-ordinary, something the artists and designers I came across over these last couple of days do extremely well. Because, in times of crisis, nothing feels and looks better than the things we love most, be it our favorite room in the house, an object we have cherished for decades, or memories we share with others. And that's exactly the kind of art people will hang on their walls this season.



(Image credit: Gilda Bruno)

My favorite booth in the fair, Steph Huang's solo show with Public Gallery scrutinizes "the price paid for global convenience, from the ambiguous origins of mass-produced goods and our dependence on ultra-processed additives, to the ecological destruction and human rights violations associated with the seafood industry and transshipment at-sea". It does so by reinterpreting found objects and food packaging of everyday use into a whimsical, vaguely cartoonish interior that gives even the seemingly worthless a function, reflecting contemporary society's "low-cost, efficient modes of consumption", but making its critique imaginative, quirky, and weirdly captivating.

If there's one thing that Frieze London 2026 taught me, it is not to underestimate the decorative and emotional power of still life. Sophie Barber's *In Our Paradise*, part of Alison Jacques's group booth at the fair, captures a flower vase of daffodils and freesias placed atop a texture-heavy dining table as a metaphor for the shortlivedness and tension characterizing everyday life, their furled stems standing for the "gravitational pull" bringing us closer to one another. The bold lettering "IN OUR PARADISE", meanwhile, contrast with the apparent simplicity of the setting, forcing viewers to reconsider what counts more — flamboyance or the lived comfort of a space sculpted by human habit and bonds.



Image credit: Gilda Bruno

Presented by London gallery Josh Lilley, Celeste Rapone's *Landing* (2026) gathers domestic and studio artifacts into an absorbing composition balancing everyday realism and psychological introspection.



Image credit: Gilda Bruno

Bella Foster's solo booth with Los Angeles gallery The Pit turns everyday domestic objects into vessels for memory and reflection. Depicting a curation of literary works sourced from the homes of the artist's friends and cultural icons, her canvas *In Two Worlds* (2026) exemplifies that approach. Painted in dynamic brushstrokes, it embodies a tension between the shared and the private, past and present, and the enchanted and the mundane.

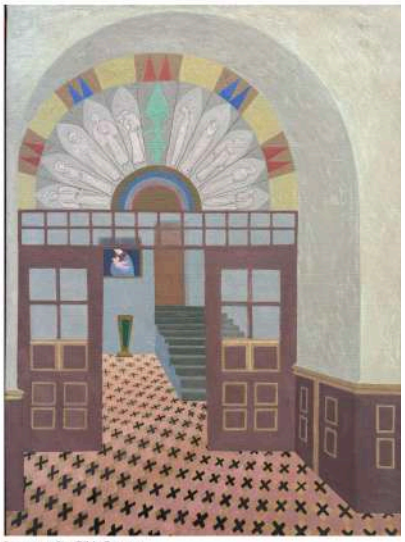


Image credit: Gilda Bruno

Late artist Dignora Pastorello's striking interiors and still life pictures offer a vital representation of a widely overlooked, more intimate manifestation of Argentine modernism. Platformed by Cecilia Brunson Projects, her artworks belong to a painting current called 'Sinisterism'. Here, "balconies, staircases, gardens, neighbors, birds, and cats become the protagonists of paintings that hover between reality and dream," explained the gallery on the occasion of the first London retrospective dedicated to Pastorello's work earlier this year.