

HYPERALLERGIC

Entering Two Painters' Visions of Home

In Home Work, Ann Toebe and Sarah McEneaney posit two different visions of middle-class domestic spaces

By Daniel Gerwin
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Sarah McEneaney, "Home" (2017), acrylic on wood, 24 x 36 in

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LOS ANGELES — If you are lucky enough to have a home, what is your relationship to it? Home Work, featuring Ann Toebe and Sarah McEneaney at Zevitas Marcus, posits two different conceptions of middle-class domestic space. In Toebe's pictures, a house is a locus of orderly refuge, while in McEneaney's home is gregarious and unrestrained. Whereas Toebe's surfaces are licked smooth, McEneaney's touch is felt in every millimeter of her paintings. Toebe is all precision and control; McEneaney draws off-kilter, with scarcely a ruled line to be found. A Toebe picture has no place for the splattered paint McEneaney includes in representations of her studio floor.

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Ann Toebe, "Retired Yard Work (Parents)" (2017)



Installation view of Sarah McEneaney & Ann Toebe: Home Work at Zevitas Marcus

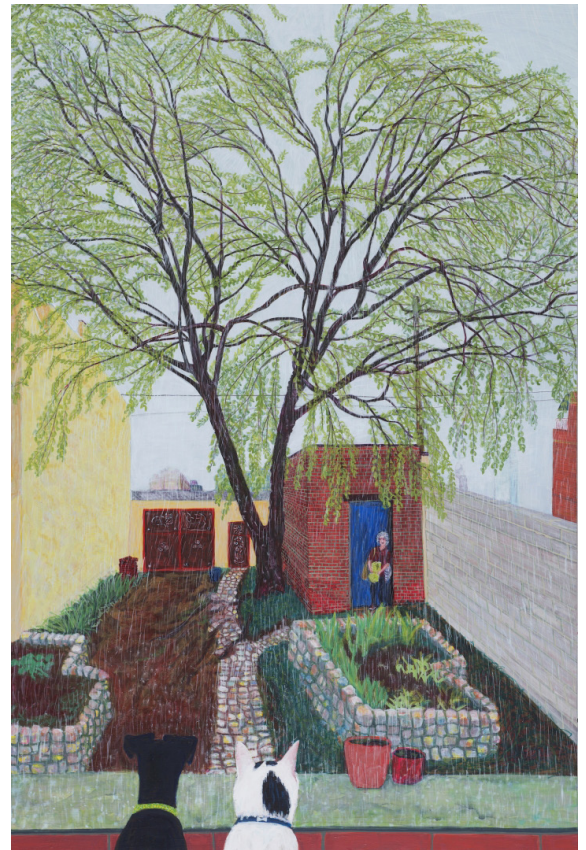
Working in gouache, Toebe paints god's-eye views of houses, splayed and flattened as one would a cardboard box, revealing the personal possessions of the inhabitants with the focus on the living room and kitchen. This divine perspective is the impersonal gaze of an omniscient creator that stays out of human affairs. Yet objects are detailed with humor and affection: kitschy throws, embroidered pillows, plates emblazoned with the US flag, children's toys, shelves of books, and the television. Devoid of people, each interior luxuriates in the serenity enjoyed by the furniture when nobody's home. Toebe's palette is an introverted, beguiling spectrum of muted greens, grays, browns, pale yellows, and quiet pinks, well suited to houses that seem contained in an impermeable membrane.

McEneaney places the viewer directly inside her home, herself appearing in each work, along with her dog and any combination of her three cats. She sits at her computer; shelters from the rain with an armload of groceries; draws, paints, and teaches her dog to sit and stay; she walks downstairs. Our viewpoint is intimate, generally no more than a dozen feet removed. McEneaney is a luminous colorist, applying acrylic in thin coats that allow earlier layers to glow through. In "Spring 2017" (all works by both artists are from this year), red brickwork buzzes against a leafy green tree on the left, a cerulean sky above, and the vermilion wall of her studio to the right. Her color is a heart turned outward.

Both artists love pattern. McEneaney exploits repeating elements such as floorboards, brickwork, leaves, fabric, and flagstone, designing with exaggerated perspective and funky spatial shifts characteristic of late medieval painting. Toebe, who draws on Persian miniature traditions, takes pattern farther, submitting her entire image to the dictates of rhythm. Unruly foliage resolves into orderly geometric shapes, swimming pools become swirling blue spirals, while rugs, bookshelves, and floorboards become pulsing arrangements within the larger scheme. Toebe's tidy vivisections contain sudden shifts that break the logic of the painting's structure but help maintain coherence. The entrance to the house in "Family Room (Sister)" should be upside-down in keeping with the way



Ann Toebbe, "Family Room (Artist)" (2017)



Sarah McEneaney, "Spring Rain" (2017), acrylic on wood, 36 x 24 in

the house has been split open, but is depicted upright as though we are seeing the house from the street. The two artists' use of pattern is their greatest common ground, a shared sensitivity to the ways in which small details of our lives coalesce into the larger rhythms that define us.

Looking at Toebbe's work, I feel like a curious intruder, sneaking around while the family is either out or asleep in their bedrooms. By contrast, McEneaney's paintings make me feel she is happy to be alone yet comfortable in her vulnerability before the viewer. Toebbe depicts homes belonging to her parents, in-laws, herself, and her sister. I wonder if she removes people from her pictures not simply due to the difficulty of arranging figures into her tight geometries, but also from a degree of protectiveness. McEneaney risks her own person in letting us get so close, but having young children myself, I recognize that I drive more carefully when my two boys are in the backseat.