

# ARTFORUM

"Critics' Picks: Rebecca Ness and Joel Shapiro"

By Rachel Summer Small

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View of "Studio Visitor," 2022. From left: Rebecca Ness, *Sam*, 2022; Joel Shapiro, *Untitled*, 2021; Rebecca Ness, *Mike*, 2021-22.

"Studio Visitor" is a two-person exhibition that features a selection of new figurative paintings by emerging artist Rebecca Ness. All of them have been hung to surround *Untitled*, 2021, a deep-blue, freestanding wood sculpture by renowned Minimalist Joel Shapiro—his sole contribution to the show.

While many artists have rendered their own studios—most famously Henri Matisse, and more recently, Lisa Yuskavage—Ness sets about depicting others' spaces, capturing her fellow thinkers and makers at work within them. Her approach is marked by meticulous detail—see the lettering of file names on the titular subject's desktop in *Willie*, 2021-22—while broader stylizations imbue her large-scale tableaux with a vivid, almost animated character. Ness portrays her subjects with a clear affection and demystifies the oft-mythologized creative process with an affable, unpretentious matter-of-factness. She does this most compellingly in *Mike*, 2021-22, in which we see the artist moving amid the clutter of his garage. The room's fluorescent lights spill into the night, illuminating pebbles and foliage beyond the concrete flooring.

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Meanwhile, Shapiro's sculpture — built out of six rectangular blocks and set on a short plinth— counters Ness's vibrant, naturalistic settings via an elegant, simple abstraction. Framed by these paintings, Shapiro's pared-down but vaguely figurative form echoes the people in Ness's pictures, navigating the fragmented organization of their respective environments. With this, Shapiro's piece conjures the stuff of your typical artist's studio, full of raw materials and endless potential. The sculpture's off-kilter stance also calls to mind the excited pose of someone in the throes of a major eureka moment, eager to see through the work at hand.

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