

artnet

Alison Elizabeth Taylor: "Why Contemporary Artists Are Raiding the Renaissance Toolkit"

By J. Cabelle Ahn

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Michael Bühler-Rose, *Bühler-Rose Studiolo Winter '26 (FDR & Grand St.)1-4*, (2026). Photo: Max C. Lee, Courtesy of the artist/Stems Gallery, Brussels.

Artists have been raiding the toolkits of the Old Masters with new urgency of late, borrowing and reworking Renaissance and Baroque compositional drama, symbolism, and increasingly, their labor-intensive methods.

While much of that renewed interest has centered on oil painting, this May three artists—**Alison Elizabeth Taylor**, **Michael Bühler-Rose**, and **Nick Doyle**—are pointing to another Renaissance inheritance: the decorative woodworking traditions of intarsia and marquetry. In their hands, these old-world techniques signal less of a market mood than a way of piecing together the authority of images in a world saturated by throwaway content.

The Gubbio Studiolo as Contemporary Inspiration

Intarsia is an ancient decorative woodworking process embraced in early Islamic art, refined in Renaissance Italy, and still practiced by artisans today. The term has since been adopted for related inlay techniques. Traditional intarsia is made from interlocking pieces of wood cut into different shapes (think: a neatly fitted mosaic), while marquetry usually refers to images made from assembled veneers—thin slices of wood—laid onto a solid backing (think: a completed puzzle mounted on board).

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Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Benedetto da Maiano, and the workshop of Giuliano da Maiano, *Studiolo* from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio, (ca. 1478–82). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1939. Photo: Public Domain.

One enduring achievement of intarsia is now housed at the Met: the Studiolo from the **Ducal Palace** in Gubbio, a Medieval Italian city. Described by the scholar and former Met director **Philippe de Montebello** as “an astounding masterpiece of Italian Renaissance woodwork,” the 15th-century trompe l’œil room features emblems of the erudition of its patron—**Federico da Montefeltro**, the **Duke of Urbino**—including books, musical instruments, and even armor.



Alison Elizabeth Taylor, *Untangled* (2026). Photo: Erin Brady. Courtesy of the artist, James Cohan, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

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This wooden sanctum is central to both Taylor and Bühler-Rose's turn to inlay. "I saw the [Studiolo] when I first came to New York in 2003, and I thought, I need to do that," said Taylor, who is showing her marquetry hybrid paintings in "I'll Be Your Mirror" at San Francisco's **Jessica Silverman Gallery** through May 30. She describes the Studiolo as "a story through still life—it's like a press release."

Bühler-Rose, who is presenting a solo booth with **Stems Gallery** of Brussels at **Independent**, came to the technique through a confluence of personal factors. The artist grew up in the punk scene before becoming a **Hare Krishna** monk and spending multiple years in India. During that time, he visited a carpenter in Mysore who was a disciple of one of his Sanskrit and philosophy teachers. "When I came back to New York, I went to the Met and wandered into the Gubbio Studiolo," he recalled, noting how the connection clicked, especially given his long-standing interest in art-historical tropes.

Michael Bühler-Rose Builds 'Layers of Aura'

Bühler-Rose combines traditional intarsia with contemporary still lifes to explore how "layers of aura" infiltrate images, particularly images of artworks. Informed by his training in conceptual photography under **Max Becher** and **Andrea Robbins** [son and daughter-in-law of **Bernd** and **Hilla Becher**], his current process begins with a Photoshop composite that is then translated into wood in collaboration with Mysorean artisans. The works reveal the surprising polychrome palette of different natural woods, from saturated yellows and reds to gradations of blues and violets.



Michael Bühler-Rose. Photo: Kent Rogowski.

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At Independent, Bühler-Rose is showing a four-panel trompe l'œil of shelves filled with objects in and outside his collection. They range from an issue of *The Fox*, a journal founded by the late **Sarah Charlesworth** and **Joseph Kosuth**, to a [Sol LeWitt postcard](#) from 1997. The former he owns; the latter is photoshopped in. The multipaneled work echoes Bühler-Rose's interpretation of the Studiolo as "almost a proto-Photoshop, hyper-personal mood board," and his references are as conceptually interlocked as the wood pieces that depict them (see: the juxtaposition of **Andrew Eldritch**, the lead singer of **Sisters of Mercy**, and **Félix González-Torres** wearing the same leather Chicago police jackets).

Central to the panels are references to the **Pictures Generation**, which he calls "a massive influence," partly for how artists such as **Robert Longo**, **Cindy Sherman**, and **Charlesworth** "responded to an inundation of imagery" by transforming those once-appropriated images into their own tropes.



Michael Bühler-Rose, Detail of *Bühler-Rose Studiolo Winter '26 (FDR & Grand St.)* 1-4, (2026). Courtesy of Michael Bühler-Rose/Stems Gallery, Brussels.

For Bühler-Rose, the "weight and veracity" of wood and the slowness of the intarsia process counteract photography's reproducibility. "Photographs are basically chemical disasters under glass waiting to happen," said Bühler-Rose, who will additionally have a solo show at **Halsey McKay Gallery** in East Hampton (opening July 18). By contrast, he added, the deliberateness of the intarsia process transforms the scene into "an intentional meditation on these objects." As **Benjamin Tischer**, the adviser and founder of **New Discretions**, put it: "[Michael's] imagery is what people are initially drawn to. But there is this sense of wonder once they realize they are seeing only raw wood."

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Alison Elizabeth Taylor's 'Language of Kings'

Taylor's hybrid marquetry technique is self-taught, mixing Renaissance woodworking with modern painting and collage. "Mark Dion hooked me up with someone who gave me a ton of wood veneer, and I taught myself how to do it in between grad school crits," she recounted, noting that her technical evolution was also shaped by Andrea Zittel's concept of "manual intelligence."



Alison Elizabeth Taylor. Photo: Erin Brady. Courtesy of the artist, James Cohan, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

Taylor works from photographs and life drawings to assemble veneers cut from one-to-one sketches, additionally shellacking, painting, and collaging the surfaces. Her references move between art history and the present, from **Manet's** *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* to foreclosed homes after the subprime mortgage crisis and, as seen at her show at Jessica Silverman, the vulnerability of female adolescence.

Taylor is sensitive to the marquetry's loaded global history. She explored it in depth during a 2009 **Smithsonian** fellowship in which she studied traditions such as Japanese *raden* and colonial Mexican *enconchado*, both mother-of-pearl inlay techniques. "There is power in rendering the mundane in this medium because of its history," she said, noting that intarsia has been the "visual language of popes and kings" but has also been dismissed as "kitsch or lowbrow."

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Alison Elizabeth Taylor, *The Merry Wives*, (2025). Photo: Erin Brady. Courtesy of the artist, James Cohan, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

"It's interesting to think about the recent history of craft in contemporary art because the hierarchy of mediums in Western art can be such a paralyzing chokehold on innovation," Taylor said. "When I graduated in 2005, I got a lot of pushback on my choice of media," she added, noting how her gallerists, **Jane** and **Jim Cohan**, also faced "resistance from an art world that wasn't sure it was 'fine art.'"

Part of the stigma may have been rooted in the material itself. **Bob Bohlen**, a leading collector of wood art in the U.S., said there was "a huge stigma around this category" when he and his wife, **Lilian Montalto Bohlen**, began acquiring examples of it in 1997. "The perception of wood art has totally changed since," he added. For proof, consider that the couple's collection has now been featured across nine museum shows and three books. Bohlen said he has also persuaded more than 45 museums to begin collecting works made with wood.

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Alison Elizabeth Taylor, *OMG* (2026). Photo: Erin Brady. Courtesy of the artist, James Cohan, New York, and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco.

From the advisory side, **Liz Parks** similarly sees "a proclivity in contemporary art right now toward methods and materials more traditionally associated with craft rather than fine art," a move she sees as a "direct counter to the hyper-technological moment."

"One might be able to use **Claude** to create a website in five minutes," Parks said. "But one cannot snap one's fingers and magically recreate an Alison Elizabeth Taylor artwork."

Nick Doyle and Marquetry's Manifest Destiny

In downtown New York, Nick Doyle is expanding the possibilities of this old-world technique for the hyper-digital present by creating denim-marquetry sculptures, on view in his solo show, "Collective Hallucinations," at **Perrotin** through May 30.

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Nick Doyle. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Doyle began working with denim around 2017, after seeing a bolt of fabric that his neighbor, a fashion designer, was throwing out. "I was making a lot of Americana-based work, and the idea of the material connected so deeply with the ideas I was already thinking about," he reflected. He soon began applying marquetry techniques to the working-class fabric. Doyle also begins in Photoshop, using the software to convert each image to the tonal scale of denim. He then alters the denim through bleaching, fading, and stonewashing; stiffens the dyed fabric with archival natural resin; and mounts the pieces onto wooden panels using steam and pressure.



Nick Doyle, *Perimeter* (2026). Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

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The resulting works filter emblems of manifest destiny through a Pop sensibility. One work places a fence over an **Ansel Adams** image—Adams being, for Doyle, “the king of tonal range”—turning an icon of American landscape photography into a meditation on imagery of westward expansion through the material worn by the laborers that enabled it.

Also on view in the exhibition is a psychic’s booth with a denim-marquetry skin that hosts an A.I. oracle named Ava. Doyle sees the installation and sculptures as symbiotic, tied to his “collage mentality” and his practice’s central theme: the promise of a future across time. “So much of A.I. is like an extension of Western expansion into a digital landscape, where we’re colonizing our minds instead of land,” he said. Conversely, he added: “There is something spiritual about handmade things... especially as we deal with so many artificial things at this moment.”



Nick Doyle, *First Come the Dreamers* (2026). Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

If the Gubbio Studiolo translated a Renaissance patron’s world into a room of symbols, Doyle’s denim collages do something similar for a more unstable image culture: a funhouse mirror in which scattered images form, fracture, and reassemble in the mind—much like the fitted fragments of marquetry itself.

Parks summarizes this very synergy among artists working in this mode, “In an era of A.I.-generated imagery and NFTs, wood and fiber-based art asserts a kind of materiality that digital media cannot replicate,” she said. “I think collectors (and all of us!) are pining for a return to slowness”—and with it, an opportunity to “visually meditate on an object that requires both time and skill.”

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