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# Review: Laura Owens/Soccer Club Club



*Laura Owens. Installation view at Soccer Club Club, Drag City*

RECOMMENDED

Recently shortlisted for the prestigious Hugo Boss Prize, Los Angeles-based artist Laura Owens debuts a new body of paintings, sculpture and ceramics at Soccer Club Club, the unlikely exhibition space of Drag City, a West Side independent music label. A prolific painter, Chicagoans might recall her mammoth 168-inch-by-132-inch work “Untitled,” a fixture of the Museum of Contemporary Art’s permanent collection. In her painting, Owens consistently deploys a range of tropes including grids, thick hovering lines that double as brushstrokes, gratuitous drop shadows and Peanuts-like cartoon characters wielding tennis racquets.

In less apt hands, bouncing between pictorial to abstract to figurative to still life to ceramic figurines would fall flat. But Owens reworks devices and motifs in multiple material applications, linking propositions of subject or content. Here, a lyrical floral motif reappears as a large, three-dimensional low-relief wall sculpture. In other works, penmanship on paper signifies the now bygone practice of handwriting. Patterns and shadows are predominantly applied by silkscreen while other passages are clearly rendered by hand. Each layer of Owens’ paintings appears direct and unfussy, and imagery is secondary to how pictorial space is adroitly sliced and subverted.



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The most striking aspect is a carefully considered installation that adeptly responds to the unusual conditions offered by the repurposed former sports bar. Triptychs on paper mounted to panels are seamlessly tucked into existing wood paneling throughout, including under the bar proper. The largest painting in the show, measuring ninety-six inches by seventy

inches, displays the widest range of virtuoso applications. Stretching floor-to-ceiling, its scale mimics the dimensions of an adjacent mirror. Navigating this exhibition is like witnessing a tête-à-tête between material and maker. For all the deft moves, Owens consistently forefronts superficiality in terms of subject matter in a way that challenges the viewer. Is it the vacuousness of emojis, sports balls or pixelated kittens that makes us uncomfortable with familiar themes? Owens achieves an uneasy yet generative balance between subject and object. (Nicole Mauser)

*Through December 19 at Soccer Club Club, 2923 North Cicero*

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