THE TIMES

The 8 best shows to see at the Edinburgh Art Festival 2025

From an enjoyable dive into Ikea's fabrics to Andy Goldsworthy's five-star retrospective at the Royal Scottish Academy, our art critic picks her highlights

Nancy Durrant | Monday August 11 2025, 11.30pm, The Times

All human life is at the Edinburgh festivals (sometimes, walking on the Royal Mile, it feels as if that's literally the case). It has never been entirely clear to me why they all happen at the same time, the Fringe and the International Festival crashing into the film, book, TV and art jamborees every August, but one advantage for the Edinburgh Art Festival (EAF) is that it can provide a welcome respite from the noise.

As a body that commissions work and provides an umbrella for exhibitions that would be happening anyway, the EAF can feel frustratingly disparate (and the website is maddening), but there is still much to enjoy. Of the commissions this year, Lewis Hetherington and CJ Mahoney's delicate film about queer Scottish lives obscured through history is the strongest, and can be found in the festival pavilion at 45 Leith Street, a disused office building given over to artists' studios (some are open to visitors on certain dates).

• Edinburgh Festival 2025: the best shows to see this year

And as ever, slipping into a gallery and shifting your mindset for an hour or so, especially if you've spent the past few hours being aggressively entertained, is always worthwhile. Here are the top shows.

Aubrey Levinthal: Mirror Matter



Watching C. Sleep by Aubrey Levinthal

© AUBREY LEVINTHAL, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND INGLEBY, EDINBURGH. PHOTO BY NEIGHBORING STATES

★★★★☆

With their quiet clarity, soft palette and domestic focus, the paintings of the Philadelphia-based artist Aubrey Levinthal feel familiar in a way that is comforting yet disquieting. Revolving around life with her husband, son and friends, they are full of relatable detail that you rarely see in painting — a Tupperware containing the remnants of lunch; the startling black of a laptop screen reflecting an overhead light; a charger; discarded hoop earrings; an escapist scribble of spaghetti; drooping houseplants; children clustering around an iPad. She skilfully evokes, too, the solitude that comes with the territory of artist — and motherhood. Don't miss her prints in the hallway of the gallery, or the small exhibition upstairs of gorgeous canvases by Mia Kokkoni, a recent graduate based in Glasgow.

Ingleby Gallery, to Sep 13, inglebygallery.com