THE SCOTSMAN

Art

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Self Portrait as Critic by Aubrey Levinthal | Ingleby Gallery / Courtesy of the artist

Aubrey Levinthal: Mirror Matter, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh ★★★★

The domestic surfaces again in the first major UK show by Philadelphia-based painter **Aubrey Levinthal** at Ingleby Gallery (we got an early glimpse of her work in the gallery's Bonnard show in January).

Levinthal is a considered and committed painter. Her project seems to be to get under her own skin and paint what that feels like, whether that's the introspective moment captured in Lunch Break or the intimacy of sleep observed. In one painting, she even observes herself sleeping.

She likes to play with scale, painting her tiny self sitting at the edge of an immense studio table, and with perspective: tables are often flattened as if seen from above, while the objects on them are in profile. She works with a delicate palette of greys, greens and pinks, but sometimes likes to add a block of much denser colour, a black sweater, the red edge of a table.

Paint is laid on in thin washes and scraped back; sometimes the paintings have an aura of transparency. But all this happens within a framework which is commited to realistic detail: a street of parked cars, a vase of pink tulips, a clear tupperware lunchbox. In Descending Subway (Stairs), hanging cleverly on the stairs, she balances the downward motion of the descending figures with a view upwards through a grille towards the lighted windows of the city at night.

Recently, she has been painting quiet interactions between people: the "drop-off women" at the school gate in the painting of the same name, three small boys on a couch, engrossed in something one of them is holding. The two women in Laps Around the Square are so close to one another each is like the other's shadow. Why are they walking laps, one finds oneself wondering?

Levinthal's are almost always quiet pictures, but they reel you in, with their hook in real life and the line tracking back into what lies beneath the surface. She reminds us that domestic life can be strange, and also that it's well worth looking at.