APOLLO
THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

In the studio with... Aubrey Levinthal

Apollo

24 JUNE 2025



Aubrey Levinthal in her studio in 2024. Photo: Courtney Apple

The work of Aubrey Levinthal is deeply tied to Philadelphia, the city where she was born, studied and still lives and works. Her paintings are usually of people in everyday situations – having lunch, sitting on the sofa, in bed, on the streets of Philadelphia – in muted, enigmatic poses and with inscrutable expressions. Levinthal's work has been exhibited mostly in the United States so far. Ingelby Gallery in Edinburgh is putting on 'Mirror Matter', comprising paintings from the past decade (28 June–13 September). It is only her second exhibition in the UK, after 'INSTALMENTS', also at Ingleby, in 2023. A series of monotype prints by Levinthal and a monograph dedicated to her work are also being published to coincide with the exhibition.

Where is your studio?

It's on the fifth floor of this old building in South Philadelphia, near where I live. It used to be a tech high school. They were going to demolish it about 10 years ago but this woman bought it and made it into a mixed-use space for tenants. There's a coffee shop and restaurant on the roof and a bar, so it's this funny vibe where you have all these hipsters, but then there are school lockers too. I think my studio is an old maths classroom.

How would you describe the atmosphere in your studio?

It has this beautiful old feel to it that I really like. I've added a bunch of rugs and chairs, but I do feel like the overall atmosphere is very still. I have north-facing windows, so the light feels very still and sort of silvery throughout the day, which is really useful to me, because I feel like that's the kind of light I'm interested in making in my paintings.



Couch with Woman (2025), Aubrey Levinthal. Photo: Neighboring States; courtesy the artist/Ingleby, Edinburgh; © the artist



Sea wall II (2024), Aubrey Levinthal. Photo: Andy Keate; courtesy the artist/Ingleby, Edinburgh; © the artist

Is there anything you don't like about your studio?

I like the hubbub of it. My floor has a hair salon on it, and there are all kinds of different businesses in the building, which encourages this idea of community. They all have glass doors, so you can peek in on each other, and of course I like seeing other people's faces, but I don't like working with that open door. I am very private when I'm making work, so I tend to hide out in the back of the space sometimes. I think it would be good to get a space that's more in a corner of the building, and maybe eventually a bigger space where I can build some racks for my paintings.

Can you talk me through your studio routine?

I feel like my schedule is somewhat regimented. On weekdays I'm in here from around 10am to 4.30 or 5pm. I'm always working on a number of works at the same time. And I don't actually leave a lot. I get here and I think, 'Oh, I should go get a cup of coffee,' or 'I should go for a walk.' That would be healthy. But then I tend to stay, either in my chair or I move around the studio, going from my painting chair to my couch, and I just kind of do a circle all day like that.

My guilty pleasure, when the paintings aren't going well, is that I play this weird Tetris game on my phone that my son showed me, this watermelon Tetris game. It's called Suica Watermelon – second graders are very into it, and so am I.

Do you have many visitors to your studio?

I don't have many. I have been trying to get better about inviting people to the studio when a body of work is done to see the paintings, because there are a lot of interesting people in the building, and I have lots of friends who are painters in Philly. But usually it's just me by myself.

Who is the most interesting visitor you've had?

I don't know about the most interesting, but most days I bring my old lazy pitbull, and she lies on the couch and doesn't move. The hair salon has these two kittens who are very curious, so they come down the hallway sometimes, and they'll wander in and try to get her to move, and she won't. It's a funny interaction.

Do you listen to anything while you work?

I listen to a lot of podcasts and audio books. I love getting in that zone where I'm tuned in, so I like a long story that's not too stressful but is telling a story, because it puts me in that in-between space of being focused on the work, but not entirely – it gives me that kind of automatic feeling.

I love fiction, but I do find it kind of hard to listen to the kinds of books that I like to read. So podcast-wise, I recently heard *The Ballad of Billy Balls*, which was good; *The Dream* I also liked – about pyramid schemes; and *The Turning*, which is about nuns under Mother Teresa. I like ones that put you in this other world, I guess.

What is the most unusual object in your studio?

That's an easy one: my easel. A couple of years ago, I was in the market for a new easel, because I had worked on this rickety one forever, and I asked my friend Bill Scott, who also used to be my teacher, if he had any brands he liked. And he said, 'Actually, I have a friend who's trying to get rid of an easel,' which ended up being the easel of Thomas Chimes, who's this artist from Philly who I spent like my school years looking up to and whose work I used to spend a lot of time looking at. So that felt really serendipitous. And it makes me want to meet the bar. It's well-used and it's been a little MacGyvered – there's a paintbrush stuck in one of the holes, for example.

What is your most well-thumbed book?

I have two bookshelves here and there are around 10 books that I look at constantly. I think the one that I've been looking at most in the last few months is a book of drawings by Christina Ramberg. She just had a retrospective in Philly. I went to the opening and John Ollman of Fleisher/Ollman gallery – a gallery in the city that I really like – said, 'You gotta go find this book.' It's got these thin pages which means you can see the drawing through the back of the page. It smells like a Xerox machine, and it's just beautiful. I've been keeping that off the shelf and looking at it a lot.

As told to Michael Delgado.

'Aubrey Levinthal: Mirror Matter' is at Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, from 28 June–13 September.