

suggest that desire was satisfied offscreen; perhaps the three photographs are clips from one narrative.

More to the artistic point, the bodies, the litter, and even the roof line in *São Paolo Grande*, 2012, seem posed in contrast to the objects in the more sober, not to say melancholy, Porto photographs. Was I deceiving myself in seeing the lineaments of satisfied desire in the roof, a sort of reclining odalisque, however less voluptuous than the figures of the nudes? The quality of the artist's engagement with the objects portrayed in the images of Porto is completely different from that of the objects in the São Paulo photographs. Cepeda seems to have viewed Porto through a glass darkly, giving it a tragic aura, as though he saw his hometown as ugly, banal, alien, a dead end with a pessimistic future, and certainly in contrast to the high-spirited excitement implicit in the São Paulo nudes.

Light sometimes jumps out of the darkness, as in *Untitled A0013*, 27, and *A0020*, all 2015—arranged sequentially so that they form a triptych, each photograph a sort of stanza in an imagistic poem—where the cloth in *A0013* (a sort of eccentric abstract sculpture and/or grand expressionistic gesture) and the circular shape of the white tabletop in *27* are in unresolved geometrical tension. The allover sprinkling of white detail in *A0020* affords an entropic release: Ingeniously, Cepeda has found nongeometric, geometric, and allover abstraction—the basic modes of pure art—in everyday objects and environments. One was reminded of Sol LeWitt's Duchampian elevation of manhole covers in his 1977 book *Photo Grids*, with the difference that Cepeda keeps his found objects in the spaces in which they were discovered rather than attempting to displace and transform them as art. Cepeda's pure forms partake in impure content, but they don't leave their contexts. The artist plucks aesthetic epiphanies out of ostensibly unaesthetic environments—perhaps nowhere more so than in *Untitled A0024*, 2015, where a dirty smear on a wall becomes an Abstract Expressionist brushstroke (reminding us of André Breton's remarks about the hallucinatory nature of Leonardo da Vinci's wall). At its most insightful, this is what photography can do.

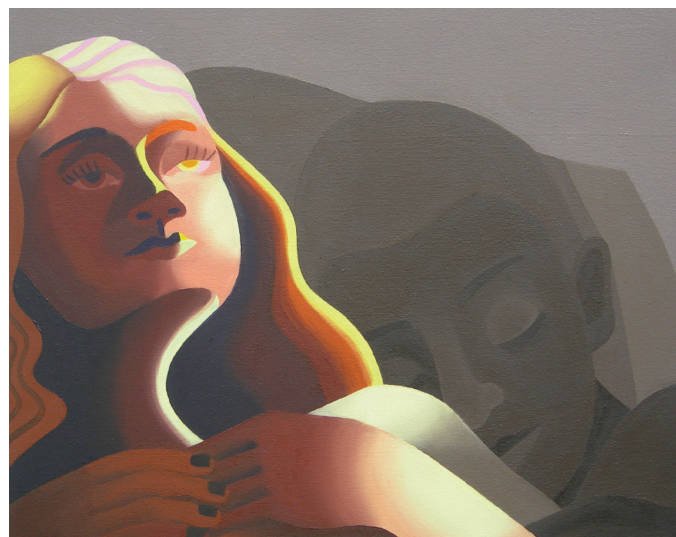
—Donald Kuspit

Leigh Ruple

MORGAN LEHMAN

However improbable—given the bleak current national mood—the self-congratulatory strain of American modernist painting known as Precisionism is again in vogue. The Jazz Age movement, known for its sleek depictions of industry that tend to fall just on the romantic side of Photorealism—which mostly subsided in favor of more comforting figural works as the Great Depression (and American Regionalism) rolled in—is the subject of an upcoming survey at San Francisco's de Young Museum. Less surprisingly, the aesthetic has popped up in contemporary painting, where its signature, evenly gradated planes have been flattened and distilled to their extremes. The effect is one of gentle rebuke, as if to say, “Look what subtleties your unqualified idealism has cost us!” To these artists' ranks, one can add Leigh Ruple, whose recent paintings gaze at the Manhattan skyline as one might from the vantage of an unheated studio in Queens. Ruple's scenes, composed of flat, clearly delineated shapes nestled to suggest dimension and shadow, evoke the Precisionist Charles Sheeler's renderings of factories from the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. Like Sheeler's celebrated industrial depictions, they are cold, crystalline things, suggesting the low, blue light of winter. But Ruple trains her eye on Brooklyn's unglamorous corners. She homes in on the weeds that gather frost in sidewalk cracks, and feral cats that roam empty, frozen-over lots at night.

For all of their deadpan insistence on place (one canvas, depicting a droll figure in a NEW YORK sweatshirt, is titled *New York*, 2017), some



Leigh Ruple,
Nightlight, 2017,
oil on canvas,
16 × 20".

of the assembled works approach generality in their documentation of urban life. (This may be in part because the artist makes a study of each tableau from memory and then returns to the site to flesh out spatial details after the fact.) Far weirder and more tender is *Nightlight*, 2017, in which the city figures only by suggestion. Here, Ruple presents a nighttime portrait of a couple in bed. The subject on the left gazes out, her face lit from the right as if illuminated by the amber glow of a streetlight. The figure's left eye is egg-like—a saffron pupil nestled in a milky iris—while the unlit eye is rendered in the same ochre tones as her reclining body. The work's composition is split diagonally by a yellow strand of her hair that forms an S curve from the crown of her head at top left to her spotlight hand and shoulder at bottom right, while gradated bands moving from orange to dark brown place the rest of her body in a warm shadow. Meanwhile, her peacefully sleeping partner recedes into a cool uniform gray. This tonal juxtaposition, borrowed from basic color theory, visually establishes the disconnect between its subjects.

Also striking, and looser, are three small colored-pencil works on paper. They again show the city (as skyline, street corner, and sidewalk in *Spring Vignette #1*, 2017; *Lovers Way #1*, 2017; and *Untitled*, 2014; respectively), but their forms are all the more affecting for the marks with which the artist has built them up. Dispensing with the uniform gradients and flat silhouettes that characterize her oils on canvas, these studies are playful and dynamic. Via myriad parallel and crosshatched lines, Ruple lets gesture sneak back in. Instead of the hard geometry of her oils, the drawings recall the folk vernacular of artists such as Martín Ramírez, and their delicately wrought compositions explode with irregular, imbricated blades of grass and scrawled spirals of wind. Nor does Ruple's visual wit suffer for the slackening of artistic reins in these preliminary studies. Her talent for tweaking color relationships to uncanny effect shines brightest in these three freewheeling sketches.

—Cat Kron

MIAMI

Katie Stout

NINA JOHNSON

If the function of designer furniture is to abandon the utilitarian demands of everyday life in favor of sleek aesthetics, Brooklyn-based designer and artist Katie Stout's “naive pop” objects—twenty of which