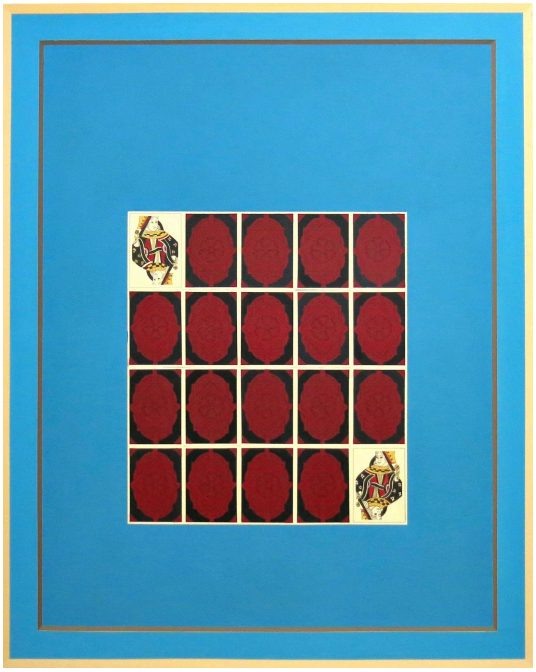
MORGAN LEHMAN
526 West 26th Street, 4th Floor, New York, New York 10001

Fern Apfel + Austin Ballard

Parlor Games

October 29 - December 19, 2026





Morgan Lehman Gallery presents *Parlor Games*, a two-person exhibition of paintings by Fern Apfel and sculptures by Austin Ballard. The show is built on the idea that the most ordinary household things, kept long enough, become vessels for memory. Apfel's paintings hang on the walls, while Ballard's sculptures stand on pedestals in the room, so that the gallery resembles a parlor in which objects are gathered, handled, and displayed.

Apfel's new work takes cues from *The Painter's Cupboard* (1769) by Antonio Pérez de Aguilar, the Mexican painter active from 1749 to 1769. Apfel's own cupboard holds dice, dominoes, playing cards, and a lifetime's accumulation of stamps, letters, and the pages of diaries and

Fern Apfel, *Two Queens*, 2026, acrylic & pen on wood panel, 30 x 24 in, 76.2 x 61 cm

Austin Ballard, *Roll-Cage*, 2026, cane webbing, epoxy clay and textile dye, 17 x 12 x 17 in, 43.2 x 30.5 x 43.2 cm

notebooks gathered from around the world. Though the paintings are often mistaken for collage, every element is painted by hand, down to the typography, the postmarks, and the softened edges of aged paper. This sustained illusion collapses the distance between representation and the real, so that the viewer must decide again and again whether they are looking at paint or at paper. The dots on a domino become a starry night, while the blank page of an open notebook suggests possibilities not yet taken. Chance, play, and correspondence recur as ways of marking time, and the human figure, though absent, is felt in every worn edge.

Austin Ballard's sculptures bring the furniture of the parlor into this company. Working from woven rattan caning, the material of porch rockers and bentwood chairs, he cuts the webbing into organic shapes and joins them without an interior mold, then presses colored epoxy clay through the weave so that the surface takes on the pattern and texture of cloth. The forms torque, arc, and swell, recalling bodies, talismans, and votive objects, while also carrying echoes of the chairs, lamps, and rooms of his grandmother's home in North Carolina. They appear to be draped or stitched over an armature that is not there, and their hollowness gives them a quiet, uncanny presence, as though a seat had been left to grow on its own.

Placed together, the two bodies of work reflect on how everyday objects acquire feeling. Apfel paints what a cupboard holds, and Ballard builds forms that suggest the furniture around it. In both cases, a surface convincingly imitates another material, whether paper in paint or textile in clay. This overlap between the handmade and the found gives the show its game-like quality, in which each work asks the viewer to guess what they are looking at, and each answer leads back to something remembered.

Fern Apfel is a Hudson Valley artist whose paintings explore memory, language, and the passage of time through letters, stamps, and printed ephemera. Though her work often resembles collage, every element is hand-painted, with exacting attention to typography, texture, and the stains, tears, cancellations, and folds of aged paper. The paintings move between abstraction and representation, inviting viewers to distinguish painted surface from implied materiality.

Apfel has exhibited at The Hyde Collection (Glens Falls, NY), The Dorsky Museum (SUNY New Paltz), The Albany Institute of History & Art, The Wassaic Project (Wassaic, NY), The Arts

Center of the Capital Region (Troy, NY), Woodstock Art Association & Museum, and Yangdeng Art Museum (Guizhou, China), among others. Her work is held in the collections of The Hyde Collection, The Tang Teaching Museum, The Albany Institute of History & Art, The Shaker Museum, The Art Students League of NY, Yangdeng Art Museum, Fidelity Investments, and Capital Group (London), among others. Her work was included in the 2026 Vassar Review, Vassar College.

Austin Ballard relies on the architecture of textiles to create complex spirited sculptures. Derived from the rattan palm, Ballard's core material evokes a sensitivity for touch and reflection. Ballard received his MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and a BFA from the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, where he also served as an Assistant Professor in Textiles. Ballard has been awarded full fellowships to Yaddo, MacDowell, the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Ox-Bow School of Art, Vermont Studio Center, Wassaic Project in New York, McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Long Meadow and the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop in Great Britain. He has received a Joan Mitchell Foundation Sculpture Fellowship, a Windgate Foundation Fellowship, a Kenneth Stubbs Endowed Fellowship, and the Peter S. Reed Foundation Grant. Ballard has held exhibitions at McKenzie Fine Art, Smack Mellon, Wave Hill, Whitespace, Post Times, Pentimenti, Ortega Y Gasset, David B. Smith, Field Projects, and Beers Contemporary. His work is on permanent display in the US Embassy of Morocco and has been included in institutional exhibitions at Brown University, North Carolina Museum of Art, Mint Museum, Provincetown Museum of Art, Boston University, Ithaca College, University of North Texas and the Rhode Island School of Design. He currently lives and works in Ridgewood, NY.