

Art Writing by Mikayla Barney, on Natalie Esther
Looking Down, The Work of Natalie Esther

Look! Down on the ground! It's a stick! It's green! It's... My foot stepped in paint? This is a common occurrence for artists like Natalie Esther, and myself, which we are all too familiar with. We look down at our spilt coffee all over the morning newspaper, we look down at a needy meowing cat, we look down at our phone to post a photo, then count the likes. When do we make time to look at things for the simple sake of looking?

In a striking red jacket, on a crisp morning, *Emma* sits with furrowed brows and flushed cheeks, moments away from tossing a *Sedaris* book aside for a pair of figure skates instead. But at this moment she is absorbed. By what? Why are we so transfixed by static moments?

Looking Down is a roundabout for human curiosity. In it, Esther quietly and sensitively depicts the details of others that catch her own eye. Through film and brushstroke, she communicates the intangible story of *more*. And I smile warmly when I look at these works as if to say across time zones, 'yeah, I've had moments like this too'. I am particularly fond of *Isabelle*, and *Emily*. I imagine who *Isabelle* might be picking pink flowers for. I wonder where she might be going in such a lovely white dress? I can hear the soft sounds as *Emily* crotchets and wish I could ask her what she is making. Why the colour blue? Asking questions about art is a doomed effort however. As Gilda Williams once wrote "writing about art is like dancing about architecture, or knitting about music. It is a paradox." Paintings don't talk back! But I see this desire all the time in my work, at art galleries and museums. People leaning in close to the

artworks, touching them (*gasp!*), metaphorically pressing their ears to the canvas hoping to hear all 1000 words caught in between the fibres. What we see in this exhibit is simple:

It's a longing for connection.

Specifically, it's a longing for that connection *to stay*. And this desire is not new. From pictographs on stones, to the likes of Sargent, to TikTok, people have always found ways to play with our physical world in an effort to capture a moment. Today we use technology to do this. Before you scoff (*ugh technology is ruining everything!*) remember that painting and film go hand-in-hand. We might not all be film directors, but many of us snap a photo of our lunch, or take a quick video of our outfit, or share a social media post with family. We curate our world. But what makes a moment a masterpiece? How do artists decide what is important enough to immortalize in paint? I encourage you to look down that rabbit hole for yourself when you're viewing this exhibit. Which painting pulls your attention down deeper? Not in voyeurism, but in fondness. In wonder, the way a child looks. Head pointed at the ground, searching for rocks. *Digging*. Nothing too small or too insignificant to examine closely. It is in this transcending invisible space of discovery, that we arrive.