

**ArtSeen**

## Melissa Brown: *Windows and Bars*

By **Riad Miah****MAY 2023**

Installation View: *Melissa Brown: Windows and Bars*, Derek Eller Gallery, 2023. Courtesy Derek Eller Gallery.

When I spoke with Melissa Brown to set up a studio visit, she asked where I was coming from and gave me exact directions to where I could find her. "Get on the back of the train to exit at the rear of the station, and then you will walk three blocks and pass just past the bodega where my studio is located... Call me when you arrive." Her instructions were specific and precise; nothing was left to chance. This attention to detail mirrors the precision she brings to the construction of her paintings.

In her third solo exhibition at Derek Eller Gallery, Melissa Brown continues exploring different applications and processes to create kaleidoscopic imagery. Fusing and mixing extends to the show's title, *Windows and Bars*, as a double entendre. In Brown's world, "Windows" may be understood as a space to peer out of, or into an architectural space. Or it can be the multitude of screens on our computers or mobile devices. Her "Bars" may not only be about cellular reception, but suggest the places depicted in a number of her images.

Much of Melissa's work has to do with perception. Acuity is how we see and remember the various platforms that help inform or challenge our memory.

ON VIEW

**Derek Eller Gallery**  
April 26–May 27, 2023  
New York

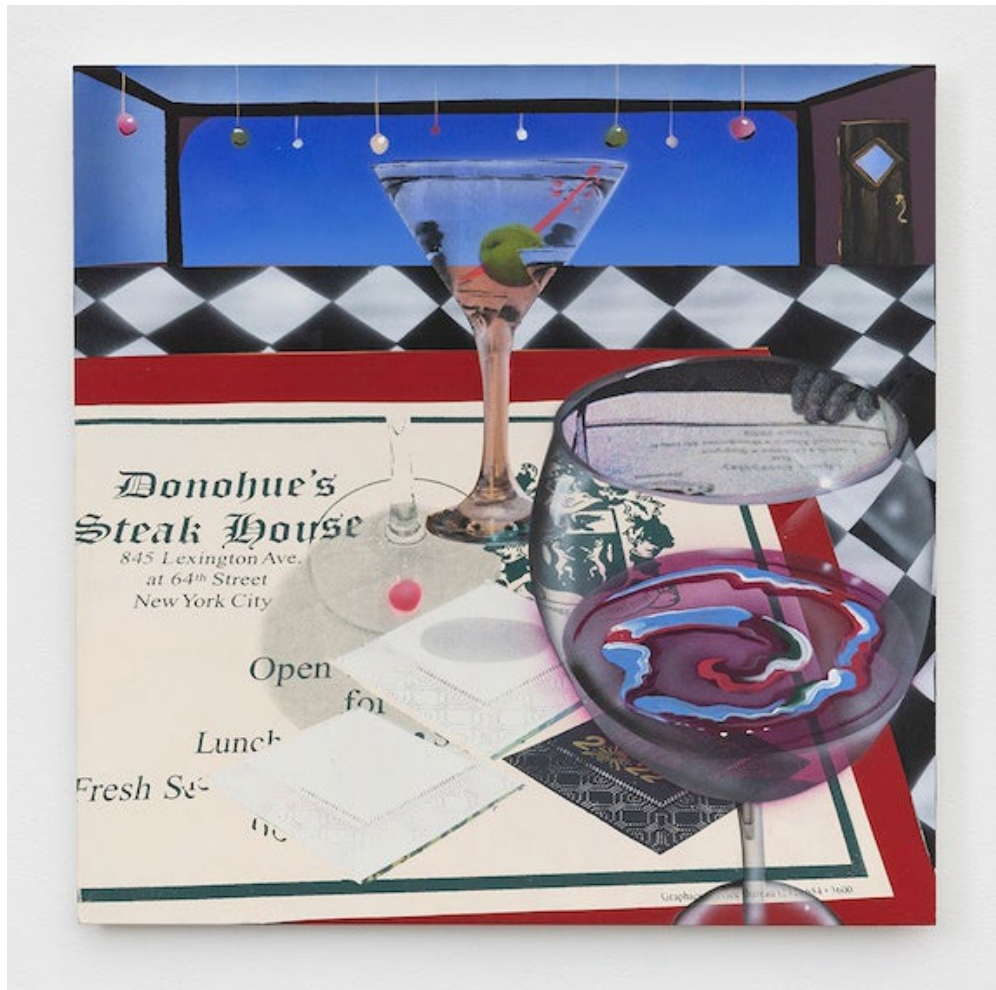


Melissa Brown, *Where R U?*, 2023. Flashe, oil, acrylic on Dibond, 72 x 55 inches. Courtesy Derek Eller Gallery.

The painting titled *Where R U?* (2023) is set inside a bar the artist frequents. The viewer's vantage point is the same as the painting's protagonist. This is accented by the painted hand holding a mobile phone in the bottom corner of the painting. The viewer looks over the bar and gazes at the bartender, focused on their occupation. The painting's subject is reminiscent of Edward Hopper's New York City view in *Nighthawks* (1942) and Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882). The mixture of CMYK printing, flashe, acrylic, airbrush, and oil paints offers a dazzling combination of skillfulness that coalesces in an intoxicating perceptual view.

In *Where R U?* dramatic diagonal wedges separate the picture plane and are punctuated by Brown's innovative use of materials. The bottom wedge has been silkscreened, revealing the top of the bar and a set of cocktail shakers. Next to the bartender sits a ubiquitous and familiar reference to the COVID-19-based contactless ordering method with an active QR code.

Which, when scanned, does not take one to a food menu but to another layer of the painting that reveals a video and soundtrack to accompany the artwork. The animation, which depicts a patterned cocktail guilefully poured into a glass, is accompanied by the sound one might hear at a bar scene. One hears background noise and periodically catches an audible comment in a woman's voice. The repeated phrase “yeah, yeah, yeah!” may be Brown's voice.



Melissa Brown, *Drink With Raven*, 2023. Flashe, oil, acrylic on Dibond, 23.5 x 23.5 inches. Courtesy David Eller Gallery.

The inclusion of a video within the context of painting is not new. One of Melissa Brown’s contemporaries, Matt Bollinger, has combined video animation with pictures, explicitly allowing the painting process to be the medium that generates imagery and the use of time with video to create the narration. What separates Brown's use of animation is how she folds the two mediums into one. Her work has managed to collapse various degrees of imagery in a framework that is truly her own.

**Contributor**

Riad Miah

**Riad Miah** is a contributor to the *Brooklyn Rail*.