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Melissa Brown: *Window Shopping*

By Katy Diamond Hamer



Installation view: *Melissa Brown: Window Shopping*, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, 2026. Courtesy Derek Eller Gallery.

Melissa Brown's *Window Shopping*, her fifth solo exhibition at Derek Eller, explores the reflective portals of storefronts across New York City. In researching different neighborhoods, the artist found a multitude of visual layers that can be experienced upon pausing for closer inspection. Window shopping was made famous in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) with Audrey Hepburn's character wistfully lollygagging at the famous windows housing jewelry on Fifth Avenue. Based on the novel by Truman Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* follows Hepburn's Holly Golightly in seeking refuge and solace in the proposed lifestyle implied in the window displays. The term "window shopping" could also be a signifier of socioeconomic status—the reason for window shopping and not *shopping* is to insinuate that one cannot afford what is in the window or is just browsing. Either way, there isn't necessarily a commitment.

Brown's windows are dynamic and focus not just on what is inside the display; they turn an eye on the world around reflected in the tempered glass surface. Her subjects, inanimate objects that range from shiny, aspirational goods such as the diamond encrusted watch in *Time Display* (all made in 2026) to the fishnet lingerie and sex toys, common in shops around the Port Authority bus terminal or Sixth Avenue in the West Village, in *Pink Pussy Cat*. The artist uses varied processes and mediums to capture these spaces, including paint (oil, acrylic, and Flashe), CMYK silkscreen, and in the case of *Pink Pussy Cat*, a video embedded in a QR code in the painting.



Melissa Brown, *Pink Pussy Cat*, 2026. Flashe, oil, acrylic, CMYK silkscreen, embedded video via QR on Dibond, 59 × 44 inches. Courtesy the artist and Derek Eller Gallery.

The paintings are particularly relatable for New Yorkers who might recognize some of the locales that the artist references. They not only create snapshots of the urban sphere, but also function as film stills that participate in a narrative that viewers are left to piece together. While representational, painterly shapes consistently point toward the artist's hand, heightened by exaggerated moments of color. Such is the case with *Optique*, which as the title suggests depicts the window of an optical boutique selling eyeglasses and likely offering eye exams. The display surface is divided nearly perpendicularly with a cross shape, two intersecting white bars encase window panes. The divisions are emphasized by candy-colored, soft pastel tones of lilac, cotton candy pink, sky blue, and lemon yellow that come from a proposed space beyond the interior of the window, a part of the surrounding environment. Two “No Parking” signs appear as small red shapes in a circular mirror. The painted window alludes to overlapping visual fields.

Functioning as documents of location—ones that could be tagged in Google Maps or Instagram—the paintings are portraits of sorts. In *Psychic Window* the artist's silhouette appears in the composition. Portrayed in a subtle tonal shift of the ground color, it provides evidence of Brown's presence, likely taking a photo, in the piece. A work titled *Parts for Learning and Practicing* has shelves lined with various cell phones, a handheld video game, and a laptop with its motherboard exposed; here the window pane is faceted with tonal shifts that divide the space, not unlike a gem. The artist, a shadow in the center and a cyclist passing by in reflection, are figurative elements—the shoppers.

The exhibition is more than a snapshot of city life. It comments on reflection, transparency, the illusion of commerce, and image-making generally. They are still life paintings of posited objects that happen to be behind glass. In a 1960 poem titled, “Mirrors” by Jorge Luis Borges, translated by Mildred Boyer and Harold Morland for the 1964 book *Dreamtigers*, the author writes:

*I, who have felt the horror of mirrors
Not only in front of the impenetrable crystal
Where there ends and begins, uninhabitable,
An impossible space of reflections*

Borges discusses the fear of the reflected surface, not for what they are, but because they have a certain relationship to infinity, a world reversed. He labels the mirror as bearers of “nothing more / [t]han vain reflection.” In Brown's *Window Shopping*, however, the ego largely disappears. The surface is not just a mirror, but a clear lens that becomes reflective in particular conditions of light—a place intended to display wares. Rather than something to fear, it becomes something to explore.