

Frieze



Celeste Rapone, Weekenders, 2023, oil on canvas, 1.9 × 1.7 m. Courtesy: the artist and Josh Lilley, London

Adulting According to Celeste Rapone

By: Tom Morton
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At Josh Lilley, London, the artist's depictions of a not-so-blissful domesticity evoke Lee Lozano and Pablo Picasso

Recently, as she approached her late 30s, the New Jersey born-and-bred painter Celeste Rapone bought a home with her husband in Chicago. Call it putting down new roots or call it (in the self-ironizing argot of her generation) 'adulting', either way this life decision seeded the idea for her show 'House Sounds', which focuses on that most intimate (and exposing) of locations: the domestic interior – a perennial subject for Western painters from Johannes Vermeer to Édouard Vuillard. What Rapone brings to the (kitchen) table, however, is both a radically honest humour and an astonishing facility with pictorial space, bending and buckling it around the anxious, contorted figures who populate her work.



Celeste Rapone, *Drawing Corner*, 2023, oil on canvas, 1.7 × 1.5 m. Courtesy: the artist and Josh Lilley, London

If the artist's solid, meaty approach to depicting the human body resembles the work of Pablo Picasso in his neoclassical period, then it also owes something to the way Lee Lozano made her anthropomorphic 'Tool Paintings' (1963–67) throb with latent libidinal energies. Essayed in deep, winy reds, *Drawing Corner* (all works 2023) shows a woman lying butt-up on a parquet floor, a latex resistance band stretched between her chunky thighs, a pencil tucked into the waist of her sheer, skimpy knickers. An ambitious multitasker, she's attempting to combine her workout with sketching a bizarre still life, in which a bundle of purple asparagus, a parmesan cheese, a snakeskin boot and a glowing skull have been arranged atop an ironing board. On the floor lies an empty, official-looking envelope. Has the arrival of a bill necessitated a panicked burst of creative labour? Is it feasible to simultaneously make great art and sculpt a great ass? Maybe somebody should speak to her about priorities – and boundaries. Aren't our homes supposed to be a sanctuary from the incessant pressures of the outside world?



Celeste Rapone, *Trymaker*, 2023, oil on canvas, 1.6 × 1.9 m. Courtesy: the artist and Josh Lilley, London

No such luck in *Blue Basement*. Here, in a flooded cellar, three figures perch on David Burry 'Shoe' chairs (mid-1990s items of novelty furniture recently much-celebrated on TikTok) while water laps at their heels. Seemingly unwilling or unable to respond to this localized environmental crisis, they instead play a lethargic game of poker around a carpeted cat tree. Notably, there's no sign of feline life in this darkly funny painting. Perhaps their pet has been swept away yowling by the flood. Sluggishness is also the governing vibe of *Trymaker*, in which a woman in a fuzzy pink bucket hat and white, dishevelled lingerie slouches on a sun-lounger behind a chain-link fence hung with key safes, while a robotic mower trims the grass of her tiny backyard, navigating a crate of gleaming oranges and a Chicago Bulls sippy cup. In a wonderful moment, a yellow swing-ball appears to fly out towards the viewer, both measuring the boundary of the property, and straining to push beyond it. We all know how this is going to end. Tethered by its cord, the swing-ball will eventually lose momentum, and spiral in ever-decreasing circles until it comes to a terminal stop. For all that late capitalism positions homeownership as emancipatory, it's also a form of imprisonment. The place we live is also often the place we die.



Celeste Rapone, *Blue Basement*, 2023, oil on canvas, 2.3 × 2.1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Josh Lilley, London

In *Contenders*, Rapone returns to New Jersey, painting a family Sunday lunch around a table heaving with spaghetti-stained plates and bottles of cheap Australian wine, beneath which a laptop streams an unwatched church service. Big-boobed matriarchs tone their skin with jade rollers, muscular dudes in sportswear man-spread across dainty faux-Queen Anne chairs, while on a sideboard we glimpse a small collection of monographs on artists who've informed Rapone's practice, among them Lozano, Joyce Pensato and Carol Rama. It's a work about taste, class and legacy, about (self-)acceptance and (self-)belief. Above all, it's about love: the precious, sustaining ingredient that makes a house a home.

Celeste Rapone's ['House Sounds'](#) is on view at Josh Lilley, until 29 April