

THE WORLD OF
INTERIORS



Celeste Rapone, *Risotto Night*, 2025. © Celeste Rapone and courtesy of Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen, and Josh Lilley, London

BEIGE PAGE

BY HOLLY E.J. BLACK
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As Celeste Rapone approached her 40th birthday, she noticed a perceptible shift. The Chicago-based painter uses Instagram predominantly as a source of art references and other forms of aesthetic inspiration, yet all of a sudden, the algorithm altered. 'I was seeing so many adverts for clothing, furniture and interiors in various shades of greige,' she says. 'It was an onslaught of neutrals – which is the polar opposite to my taste – and it was bizarre to see all these images of great paintings interrupted by nothing but beige rugs.'

The push towards a more anodyne existence troubled Rapone, particularly as it seemed to reflect an idea of shrinking visibility and passive womanhood. She was struck that the internet should dictate a new phase of her existence that was seemingly at odds with her entire personality, but instead of discarding this supposition, she grappled with it to produce a new series of paintings, which are now on show at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York City.

Usually, she sets about a new canvas by using vibrant grounds. They give her compositions a luminosity that carries through in delightful articulations of strangely flattened and twisted bodies, which are situated in fictional spaces anchored by very specific objects and materials. For these new pieces, however, she embraced the muted palette that was being foisted upon her online and began with 'diet tones', and a particular hue that she affectionately terms 'gravender'. It features most heavily in *Crumbs* (2025), an arresting vision of a woman with an ample behind, collapsing over a countertop while she wipes debris into her hand. Her pose undercuts this thoroughly routine activity, as if giving an insight into her exhausted psyche.



Crumbs, 2025. Celeste Rapone and courtesy of Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen, and Josh Lilley, London

As with all of Rapone's paintings, these elements of surreal montage are peppered with recognisable items expressed in fastidious detail. 'I grew up in an Italian family in New Jersey, in what you would call a "maximalist" environment,' she says. 'I am constantly thinking about objects that hold resonance or represent the everyday, and the value they might have held when I was a child versus what they represent now'.

This might be the familiar sight of well-used cooking pot, a mid-century chair, or the spines of several well-thumbed books. In collapsing these references into a single picture plane, she flattens the chronology. In many ways, her scenes emulate the collections we amass in our homes over the years, in a form of idiosyncratic biographical assemblage.



Morning Bathers, 2025. © Celeste Rapone and courtesy of Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen, and Josh Lilley, London

Rapone makes no preparatory drawings, instead preferring to see where a work naturally takes her. She resists any hierarchy between figures, spaces and objects, preferring to give them all equal weight. Often, the ensuing scenes shape the formal considerations of her paint application too. Depicting the inherently dusty confines of a garage, for example, demands layers of dry brushwork, while in a piece like *Drifters* (2025) the atmosphere of a sweaty, wet hot tub is relayed through slick glazes achieved with the aid of pure walnut oil.



Drifters, 2025. © Celeste Rapone and courtesy of Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen, and Josh Lilley, London

A prevailing theme within her work – which is even more evident in this latest output – is a sense of awkwardness that comes with the territory of existing in a female body. Nudity is rendered exposing and troublesome as opposed to titillating, and the unusual layering of various forms (which often feels akin to collage) gives a sense of cluttered space, where one might get tangled among party streamers or trip on a discarded ball of twine. In *Vanity* (2025), the last work to be completed for this show, the back of a twisted torso is depicted wriggling out of shapewear, while sat balanced on a folding chair. An unfathomable wooden staircase dominates the foreground, removing any sense of definable domestic space.

The precarity and vulnerability seen here aligns with Rapone's own shifting sense of self. She is wary of the impossible tweaking she sees on social media, seemingly to stem the tide of ageing, and these concerns find ways on to the canvas. Ultimately, she sees the role of the artist as one of constant, uncomfortable exposure. 'You spend so much time alone, making private decisions in private dialogue with the work,' she says. 'Then one day you have to show it to people. It can be so embarrassing. I don't think there's many things more vulnerable than making a painting'.

'Some Weather' runs until 18 Oct at Marianne Boesky Gallery, 509 West 24 Street, New York.