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FIELD NOTES

PRECIOUS MOMENTS IN THE BACK ROOM: EXHIBITIONS OF QUIET PLEASURE IN LA

Brazilian landscapes, beige still lifes, dollhouse cutouts, and whispy dreamscapes prove that subtlety can speak volumes.

By Bryan Barcena

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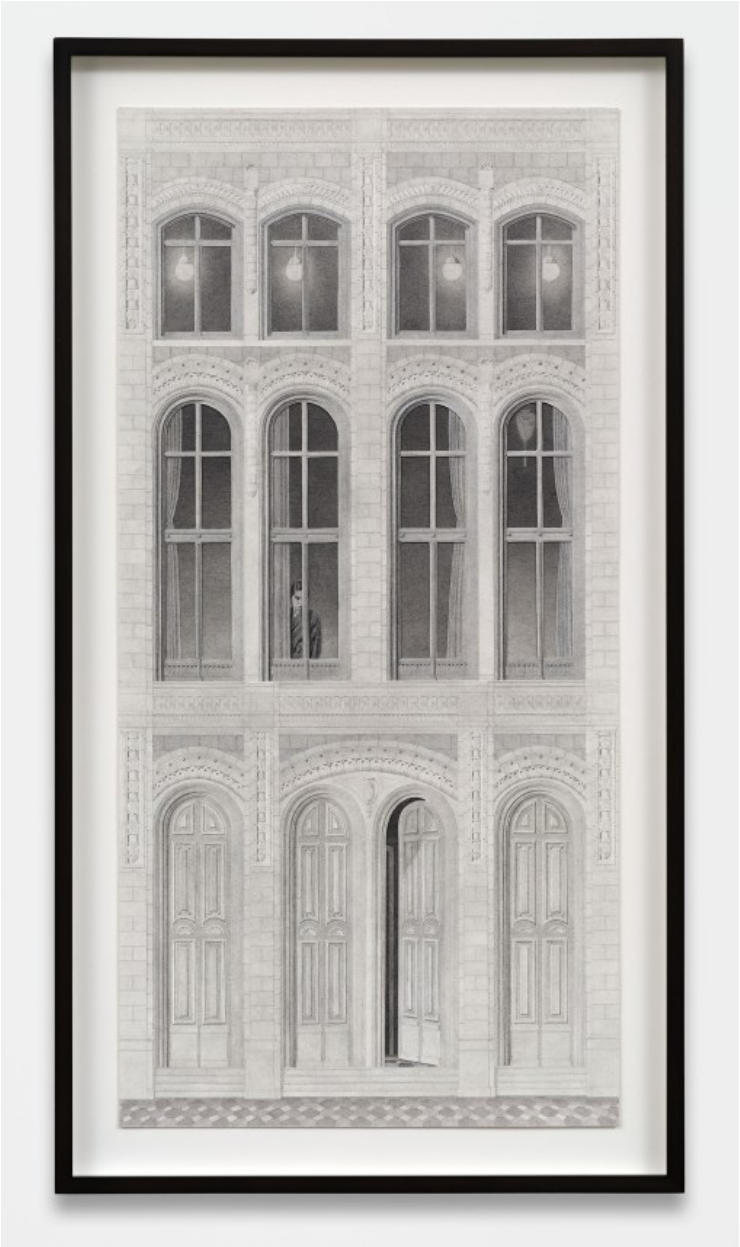


Installation view of "Milano Chow: Fantasy Street." Courtesy of Hollyhock House. Photo by Joshua White.

"I WANT THAT FOR MY HOUSE." This is a category that I apply to a great deal of the art I've been seeing around Los Angeles galleries. Art that "I want in my house" relates to what I want to see more of in the world; the type of art that I can enjoy and commune with at my leisure in the privacy of my own home; an art that affects me in surprising and sensuous ways, only gently confounding the intellect. Over the past few weeks, I was fortunate enough to encounter several backroom exhibitions that offered this kind of rarefied aesthetic experience.

At the Hollyhock House in Barnsdall Art Park—a place that I wish was my home—was a darling show by Milano Chow, organized by Cole Akers. The pieces were thoughtfully arranged in a tiny back gallery originally designed to be a child's

bedroom. Chow has been an LA fixture for some time—her quiet and slyly subversive black-and-white works always punch above their weight. The artist's oeuvre mainly comprises modestly sized paper cutouts drawn in pencil, ink, and acrylic, which often depict the architectural facades, interiors, and rather surreal decor of Victorian, Edwardian, or American colonial buildings (think window sashes, pediments, capitals, entablatures, and so on). The detailing is exquisite, akin to the pleasure one experiences when peering into a well-crafted dollhouse. Figures can often be seen in the windows, sneaking across arcades or peeking out of doorways. The artist's muted palette, straightforward perspective, and solemn mystery deliver a sense of melancholy that belies the works' toylike presentation. Here at Hollyhock, the drawings were hung on dark pink and dark mahogany wood accented walls, hung on a stone mantel, up against the doors of a wooden closet, and installed on sumptuously upholstered room dividers. A small, maquette-like paper sculpture sat on a pedestal in the corner of the room, bringing Chow's world into the third dimension, but ever so slightly. The piece made me think of a children's pop-up book that had been drained of all color—my kind of domestic bliss.



Milano Chow, *Exterior (Open Door)*, 2026.
Courtesy of the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles

Bryan Barcena, *Artforum*
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