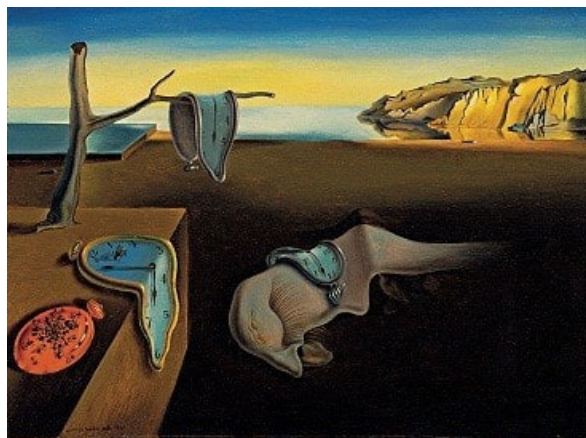


A DEEPER DIVE: In the REAL WORLD

WOW www.wowgallery.com/publications/4-a-deeper-dive-in-the-real-world-author-marian-ang

Brooklyn-based American visual artist Drew Englander's (b. 1985, Ventura) latest series of domestic still lifes and genre paintings is a unique account of contemporary life in the shadow of a pandemic-stricken world. Moving from room to room, Englander documents personal paraphernalia and colourful domestic tableaux with an ironic exuberance that belies the suffocating, disorienting new form of reality experienced by many during successive pandemic lockdowns. "I'm mostly interested in everyday things," explains Englander. "Objects that are personal to me, spaces that I'm always in. I usually sit in a room and quickly draw all the objects that feel like they have some kind of personality."^[1]



Left: Salvador Dalí. (Spanish, 1904-1989). The Persistence of Memory. 1931. Oil on canvas, 9 1/2 x 13" (24.1 x 33 cm). © Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph taken in 2004.

Right: Drew Englander, Point Break, 2022

Englander vividly captures the unique texture of endless days spent indoors. Using dizzying perspectives and radical foreshortening, Englander transforms ordinary objects - air conditioning units, mirrors, keyboards - into melted Dali-esque surfaces that are a

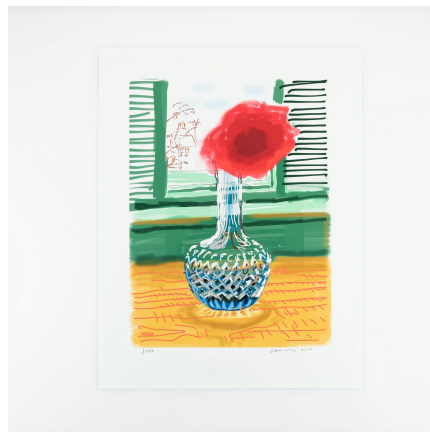
Surrealist meditation on the collapse of conventional notions of cosmic order and the passage of time. Tilting perilously towards each other, these spindly coffee tables, warped shelves and granite-like sofas draw the viewer into a world that defies rationality.

“Start getting real”

Englander’s latest series owes its name to “The Real World”, the pioneering American reality television series that premiered in the 1990s. Following the lives of a group of strangers who live together in a house under constant surveillance over several months, each episode opened with the tantalising words, “Find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real”. “The Real World” faced criticism for staging its participants’ interactions, providing a contemporary allegory about the “realness” of human experience amidst the constant pressure of ratings and spectacle production.

Ominously, in Englander’s *REAL WORLD*, digital portals to the outside world - televisions, computers, laptops, sometimes several screens adjacent in a single painting - glow with a radioactive intensity. Ubiquitous black and white charging cables snake from devices and wall sockets. Physical apertures into the “real world” outdoors possess an ambivalent nature, mediating the outside world in a way that obscures rather than reveals. Brown-framed bulging windows caressed by wilted plant tendrils and draped with filmy curtains reveal blurry glowing moons, eerily airbrushed foliage, and sinister, silhouetted buildings aglow in the distance. Titles such as *Streets of Fire II* warn more explicitly of the dangers beyond home. In a post-truth era, the viewer is forced to question the nature of authenticity and reality in each visual encounter.

“A weird little world in flux”





Top: David Hockney, iPad Drawing 'No. 281', 23rd July 2010

Bottom: Drew Englander, House Party II, 2022

Like the British Pop artist David Hockney, Englander is adept at both digital and analogue methods, using an iPad to sketch and compose his images before completing the work on canvas with acrylic paint: "I just draw with my finger [on my iPad] and try to get things out as quickly as possible. I like the drawing to be messy and loose so I don't overthink it, I just throw everything in the soup and see if it works."^[2] Projecting his drawing onto a large canvas, Englander refines the image during the painting process with details and shadows, "making the pictures believable. Not realistic but believable in their way."^[3] Born in a Californian beachside city popular with surfers, an easy, seductive and perpetually sunny familiarity pervades Englander's works. Although Englander shares Hockney's love of the "Matisse colour palette" of striking azure blues and turquoises, scarlet reds, and grass greens, Englander adeptly switches between the paintbrush and airbrush to create fields of disconcerting smoothness in his paintings.

"The more I sit and stare at things, the weirder and more fluid they seem.. their funny shapes and how they change depending on the light, where I'm viewing from, my mood even ... I make the paintings look like that experience. A weird little world in flux." - Drew Englander^[4]

This *REAL WORLD* of Englander's apartment in East Williamsburg spawns hallucinatory, anthropomorphic characters hidden in plain sight within the panoramic interior compositions. Windowed eyes peer down in *California Dreaming* and *Swish II*, tentacled rivulets spring through the showerhead in *Hard Water*, and a frowning basketball court flashes on screen for a moment in *Swish II*. These compressions and distortions "mimic our own various mental distortions – the way a memory can change in subtle ways every time you recall it or simply how your mood can influence the way you see", explains the artist.^[5]



Top left: David Hockney, Views of Hotel Well III, 1984–5 Photo: © Tate, London 2022

Top right: Henri Matisse, Red Interior: Still Life On A Blue Table, 1947. Collection of Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen K21, Düsseldorf. (Courtesy of www.HenriMatisse.org)

Bottom: Drew Englander, Lounge Act, 2022

"California Dreaming"

REAL WORLD documents a unique time in contemporary human history. In the same manner that Surrealists responded to the uncertainties and chaos of a new world order in the aftermath of World War I with a search for meaning within the unconventional and uncanny, Englander captures the strange and fantastical within the day-to-day of pandemic life. He conjures up a world stranded somewhere between real life and hyperreality, revealing the richness and dynamism of the human consciousness, and effortlessly switching between technology, sports, music, entertainment, art history and domestic mundanity to reframe the collective experience of the past few years with absurdist wit. In Englander's world, the boundaries between reality and unreality are constantly shifting; it is up to the viewer to choose which side they are on.

Drew Englander has been represented by WOAW Gallery since 2022.

^[1] Drew Englander, quoted in Ilona Kohn, 'Drew Englander', 30 April 2021, [online](#)

^[2] Ibid.

^[3] Ibid.

^[4] Ibid.

^[5] Drew Englander, quoted in Olivia Hingley, 'Andrew Englander's distorted paintings offer a new perspective on the still-life genre', *It's Nice That*, 13 October 2022, [online](#)