

Olivia Van Kuiken



FIVE NYC PAINTERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AVERY NORMAN

# Five New York Painters

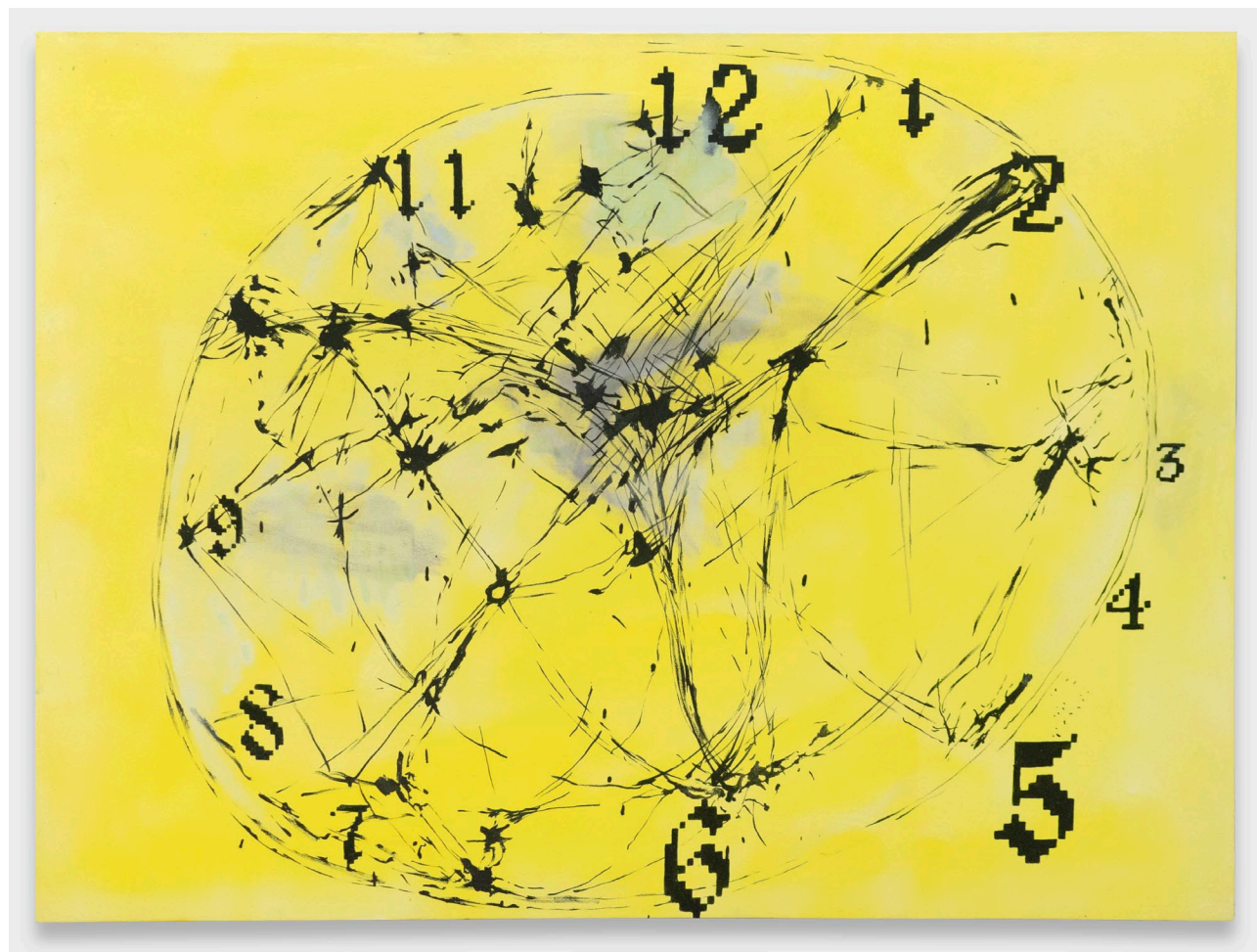
Every generation of artists kills painting and then brings it back to life. In New York City, an unorganized cluster of female painters born in the mid- to late 90s are currently doing exactly that—each in their own, self-contained practice, and yet collectively showing the creative breadth of the medium in 2023.

TEXT BY REILLY DAVIDSON

# Olivia

**Olivia van Kuiken (friends refer to her as “Liv”) meddles with unstable visual representations and the failures of language, oscillating between the points at which they come together and those at which they fall apart. She cultivates her visual fields with specific regard for literary and conceptual reference points. The doubled figure is repeated across canvases, as van Kuiken breaks down the boundaries between contradictory emotional states and frameworks.**

**Hundreds of films coursed through Liv’s adolescence, as she was transfixed by still and moving images. A practice comprising black-and-white photography eventually gave way to paint on canvas as she cruised through undergrad at Cooper Union. Her first solo show in New York opened in spring of 2022 at King’s Leap. She was onto something. The paintings on view contained disembodied heads floating in oases of paint (two of which directly emerged from de Sade’s *Justine* and *Juliette*), as well as clear demonstrations of the artist’s pronounced ability to handle paint.**



**She continues to honor de Sade’s licentious output, which goes beyond mere perversions and out toward the edges of perception. His linguistic freedom, alongside that of Unica Zürn, has been the energetic tugboat Liv remains moored to. Both writers celebrate extremes, as they manifest in spaces that exist between and beyond pain and pleasure, where clarified experiences dissolve into the abyss of the unknowable. Liv’s curiosities also draw from psychological investigations of the 20th century, particularly those of Rhoda Kellogg and Fernand Deligny, as they relate to the developments and shortcomings of language. By observing these studies as energetic touchstones, Liv broadens the scope of understanding through images. The precarity of her representations liquify hardened borders, liberating the process of painting so that the artist may work outside of formal constraints.**

**Liv’s studio functions like a treehouse—a space set away from the rest of the world, consigned to fantasy, creation, and research. Out front, a loud-mouthed dog mans the fenced-in parking lot. After traversing through a small auto repair and climbing up a set of stairs, you enter Liv’s zone. This is where it goes down. Books on Soutine, Ensor, and the like populate the entryway; a couch sits just beyond. In the daytime, light floods the room, charging the already vibrant works-in-progress with illumination. Drawings line the walls, alluding to a future composed in paint. This is the place where the abstract and referential are in constant friction, where Liv unloads a bevy of obsessive impulses.**

