

# BROADWAY

Adrienne Rubenstein  
*Magic Show*  
February 8 – March 16, 2024

Broadway is pleased to announce *Magic Show* our second solo exhibition with New York painter Adrienne Rubenstein. The show will be on view February 8 - March 16 with an opening reception Thursday, February 8th 6-8pm.

They sway and bob on the surface like so many bath toys, capsizing in the eddies: Goldfish (à la Matisse, indicated by the sparest of outlines, segments of orange, or oblong blips round at the head and not at the tail). Lily pads (shorthanded as a circle missing a triangular notch that also reads as Pac-Man, a kind of patron saint here of appetite and rampant desire). Waterlilies, that are also tulips (and upside-down ghosts, again, à la Pac-Man). Other kinds of flowers (either shaped like breasts and areola with amoeboid or softly scalloped circles buttoned in the center, or like straggly palm trees or spooky witch hands bent with pointy fingers for petals). Vases, pitchers, vessels. Chairs. Hints of a window (suggesting interiors). A pair of bees (wasp-like, tonguing two flowers). Strawberries (dangling on the vine, like charms on a bracelet) and a cluster of grapes. Broccoli, so much broccoli (sometimes doubling as trees). And fragments of a fairytale landscape. Scaled haphazardly, these pictograms resist cohering into representational scenes. Rather, their adjacencies make up a fluid psychic map of attention paid and emotion invested.

Adrienne Rubenstein's embrace of small, silly, antiheroic things—metonyms of a quiet life of observation and daydream, a home life, redolent with childhood associations—may give an initial impression of one-dimensionality, like stickers on a folder or backseat window. They are starting points, ways in. So many excuses to paint: "I try to work with simplified subjects so the painting can just be painting." While they can be extremely graphic, the shapes she uses and reuses are fundamentally in service of and subsumed by wild conflagrations of color and unblended strokes that make her paintings radiate outsized life force and ineffable glow.

In "Magic Show," Rubenstein is at least as interested in dissolving things as in appearing them. Things have the quality of apparitions and afterimages, as though fleetingly formed out of cloud, shadow, or hot neural firings. And yet, her handling of paint is visceral, material, and creamed. Building up surfaces with scrubby swaths, loose lines, and intense patches, she makes mark-making the main generator of shape, competing right alongside imagery. A raw energy runs through all things. Color and stroke have a touch and go relationship with what she depicts, in the manner of the Fauves or Emil Nolde. Our eye (her brush) bounces from spot to spot, tracking accents of one lush hue or another across positive and negative space. Heavily outlined objects rupture just short of completion: more than things themselves, she portrays the condition of being uncontainable, where inner juices burst forth and the surrounding atmosphere rushes in. Across each painting lingers an air of great release.

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Speaking of atmospheres, Rubenstein's are typically tinted purple and blue. In fact, blue, especially when deep and dark, has become an aesthetic anchor (her 2023 solo show in LA, after all, was titled "Blue") and a gathering of blues signals the sublime in her work—something very beautiful, breathtaking, or swoon-inducing, something knee-bucklingly lovely. Aqua and sky-blue mostly cover a warm, coral pink underpainting that emanates vivid sunset tones in *Several Gardens*. Daubs of periwinkle and teal steal the show in *Magic Show*. And *Blue Broccoli* wrangles countless shades and tints to conjure from its abstract watery depths an evocation of Monet's indescribably divine *Nymphs*, while also being churned by the lyrical goof of her chosen subject matters and the crayon-fisted way she shapes them. For Rubenstein, color is anything but flat; it is a chorus of varying pitches and modulated opacities (she wields white masterfully), a heightened manifestation of intuitive, irrepressible, wet-on-wet movement that can be spastic or casual or considered and is recorded right there for all to see as painting.

~ Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer