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Idylls

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IDYLLS

By

Maddie Aunger

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For The Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Matthew Sontheimer

Lincoln, Nebraska

March, 2022

IDYLLS

Maddie Auger, M.F.A

University of Nebraska, 2022

Adviser: Matthew Sontheimer

An “Idyll” is defined as a happy, peaceful, or picturesque scene. The term references poetry that describes a small intimate world, and scenes from everyday life.

This exhibition, *Idylls*, showcases the little world of my home here in Lincoln, Nebraska. The paintings mirror my experience of the domestic spaces in my life, and the peaceful moments I encounter. In *Idylls* you are encouraged to be idle. We do ourselves a disservice when we don’t take the time to slow down.

My work begins as an excitement about a specific formal quality, a shape of light, a hint of color, repetition of form, or a composition of layered spaces. The paintings are quiet, crisp, orderly, and controlled representations of places around my home executed at an intimate scale in acrylic on panel.

This body of work began as a series of paintings that came out of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They focused on a single window in my home here in Lincoln. Being home for long stretches of time was not a new experience for me; I’ve always been a homebody. I had only been in Lincoln for eight months; the first weeks of isolation forced me to become more familiar with this house. Making that series of paintings gave me something to focus on while the world outside felt out of control.

I aim to capture instances that pull me out of the day and bring me into the moment. Light that only briefly touches a specific spot, shadows that stretch and disappear within minutes, spaces seen through barriers, and colors reflecting from unknown sources highlight and bring my attention to the spaces that might normally fade into the background or go unnoticed. Each painting explores a distinct moment I've experienced while moving through a typical day; I do not change my routines or go searching for compositions. With a focus on the visual experience of the place, saturated colors and sharp shadows replicate the feeling of having fresh eyes and the surprises that each new moment can hold. This work encourages the viewer to slow down and take notice of their presence in spaces.

While the paintings are grounded in observation and representation, I edit and intensify certain elements to imbue each with a more palpable sensation of the moment. An interest in the structure of the spaces I inhabit leads to a distillation of form and heightening of contrast. Exactness of things like peeling paint, dirt, screws, or imperfections of manufacturing are ignored. In this body of work I am not interested in whether the space is brand new or falling apart, but in the design and composition of the image. In these moments my vision narrows, I don't see the space's imperfections. I idealize the scene and remove distractions to extend the brevity of the moment and hold the viewer in the space before you snap back into seeing every detail. I am drawn to the patterns and repetitious shapes created by specific instances of light hitting structural forms and the shifts of perceptual color created by this light. Simplifying the construction of the architecture emphasizes these value and hue modulations. Angles of light, sizes of

shadows, and proportions of elements are adjusted intuitively to suit the composition. There is balance to be found between the visual weights of light and dark, areas of reduction and busyness, and subtlety of hue or amplified saturation.

Different points of view, varied proximity to barriers like walls, windows, and fences, and distances between spaces present the viewer with opportunities to notice how they engage with the places they are most comfortable in and the visual surprises contained within them. Layered spaces and the interstices between, like windows and alleys, create interactions between different places and between paintings.

In my work, color and light are vital. The white surfaces of window trim and siding and intense shadows or cast light take on surprising colors, while light cascades in through blinds and cuts across surfaces. Light is a character in the world of my work, interacting with everything in its path. It is predictable, inviting the viewer to speculate the time of day depicted, but it can also be surprising and catch you off guard. Light can carve out special moments of peace in our hectic daily lives if we pause to observe it. Light and color are constantly changing and shifting and act as a reminder of the present moment. The moment of pause is prolonged in the making of the painting. *Idylls* showcases the moments I savor. The scenes I paint are peaceful, idealized and picturesque.

Idylls embodies the elements that are core to my practice. The paintings are quiet and contemplative explorations of solitude in domestic space. Each captures a unique moment of light and color, through heightened contrast and manipulated saturation. Spaces are repeated, architectural barriers are layered, and gaps are explored. They

romanticize the places where I spend my time by documenting the specificity in everyday moments, as well as provide snapshots into this brief period of my life. *Idylls* invites the viewer to slow down, step into my space, and recognize that these moments can be found within their own worlds.

A few select paintings from the exhibition:



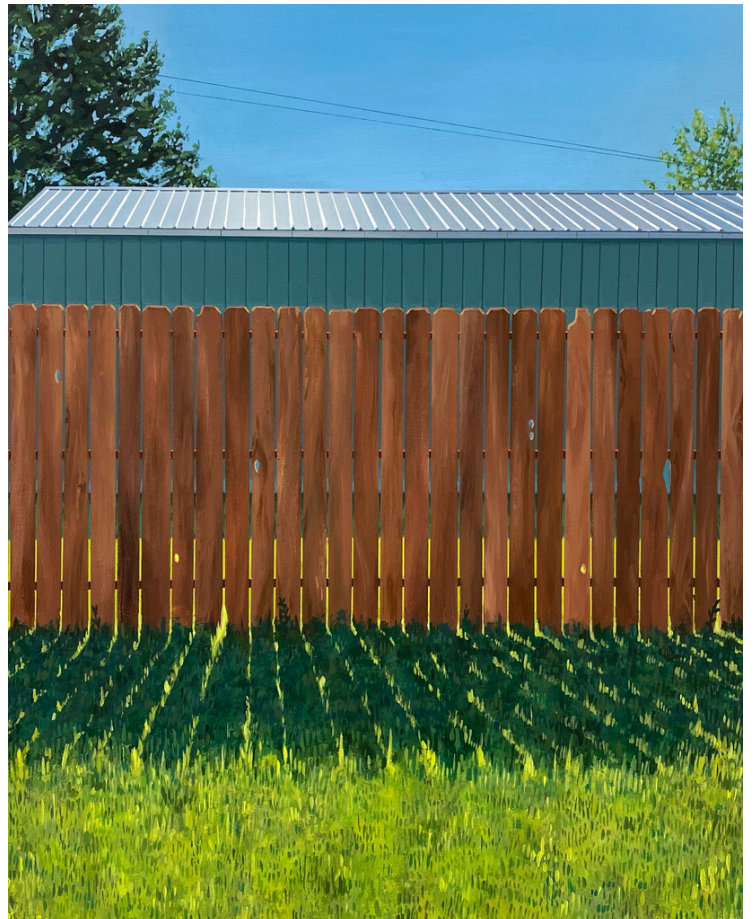
Backyard Self Portrait, Acrylic on panel,
16"x20", 2021



Evening Alley, Acrylic on panel,
16"x20", 2021



Golden Hour, Acrylic on panel
11"x14", 2021

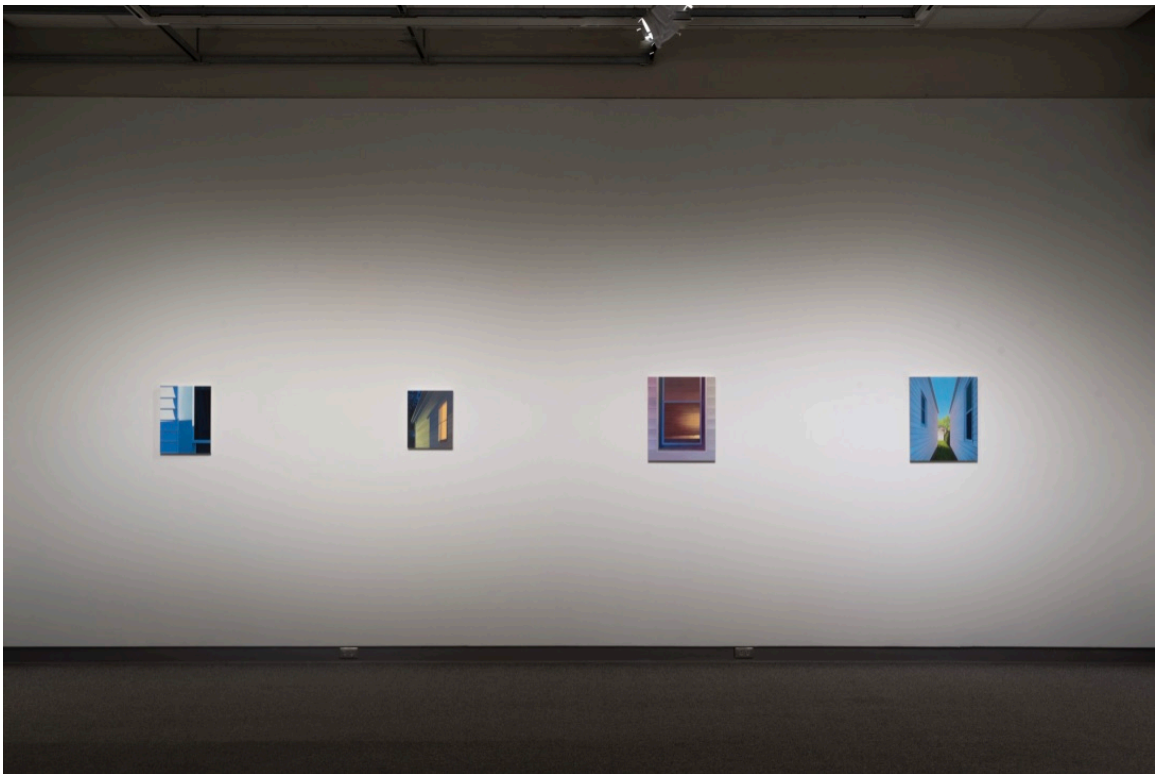
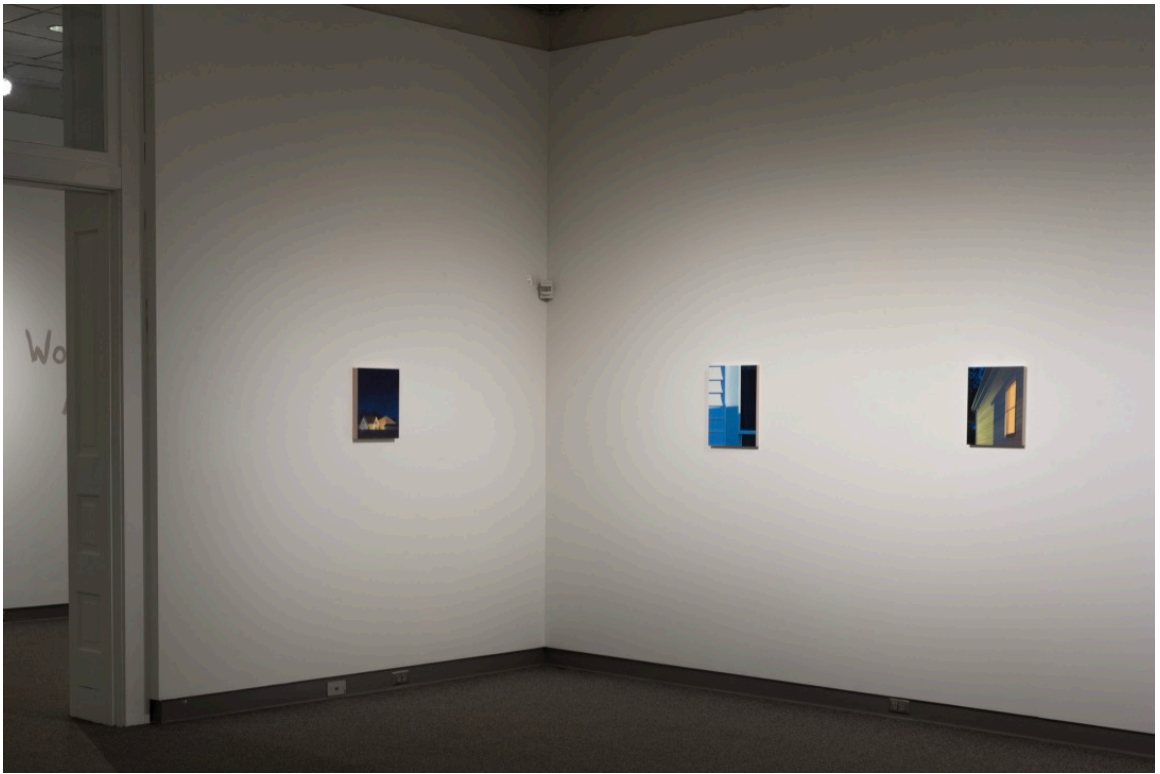


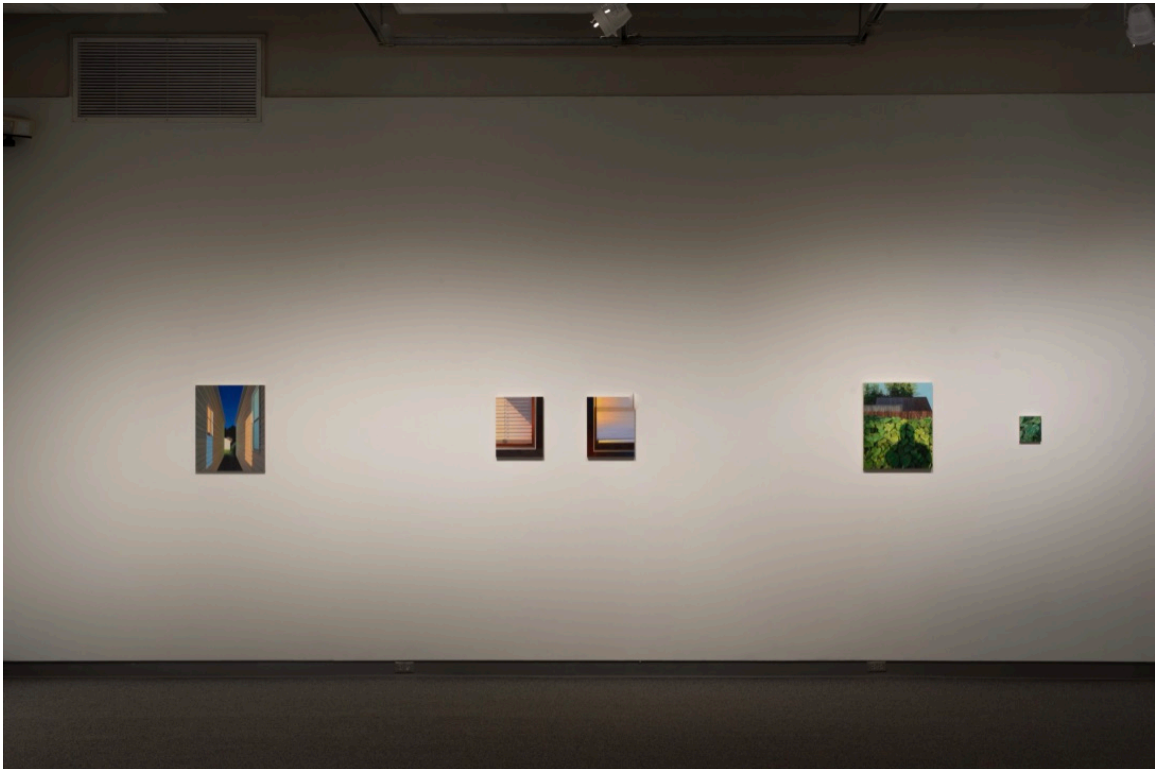
Morning Light, Acrylic on panel
11"x14", 2021

Instillation Images





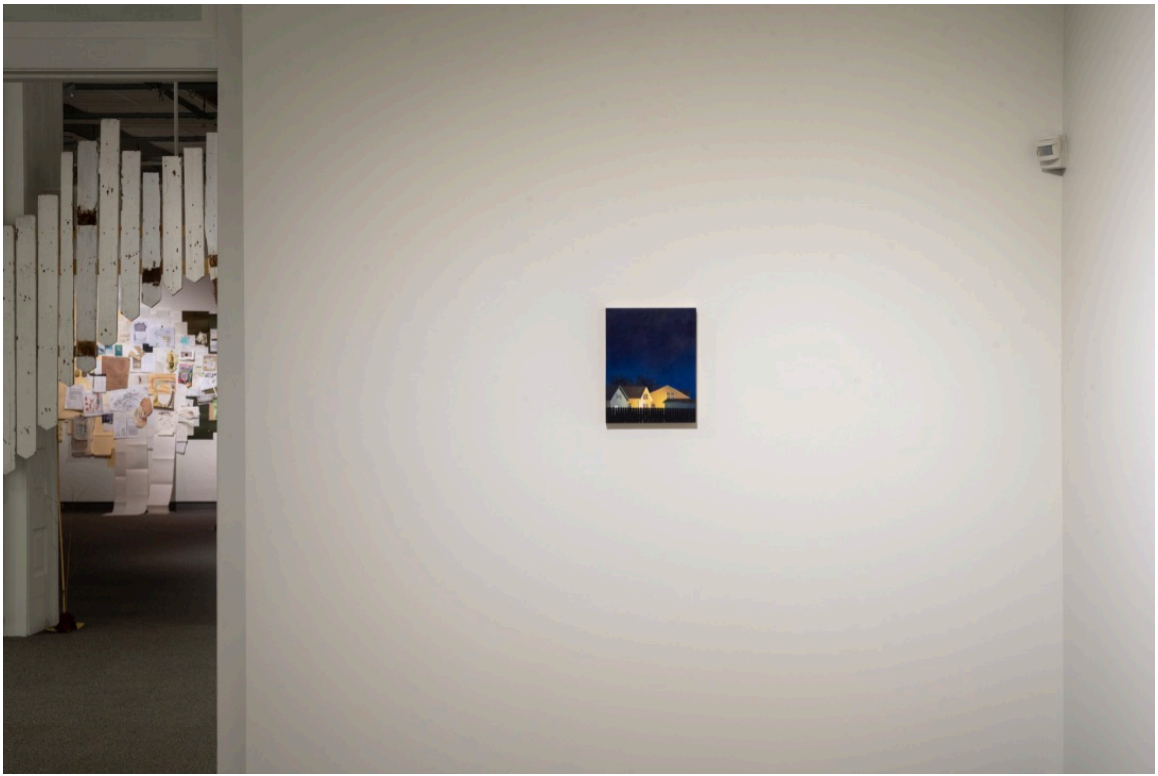












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