

ARTFORUM

Mathieu Cherkit

By Mara Hoberman | December 2022

Mathieu Cherkit's interiors are homey, relatable, and destabilizing. Characterized by charming disarray—unwashed dishes, scattered toys, yellow rubber gloves near an open toilet bowl—the artist's latest room-by-room portraits of his home explore domesticity vis-à-vis elastic notions of space and time. In addition to depicting multiple perspectives at once, Cherkit's paintings contend materially with painting's inherent flatness and fixity. The fourteen works presented in "Time's Up?" featured heavy impastos in shades of burgundy, teal, ocher, and cerulean. The jagged crusty paint, extending beyond the edges of each canvas (up to nearly half an inch some cases), and the fact that these stratified paintings were far from completely dry thwarted certain physical and temporal limits of painting.

Many of the works—a mix of large-scale interiors and smaller still lifes—incorporated Cubist tropes such as the elimination of one-point perspective and the fragmentation of the composition into multiple interlocking planes. Walls, doors, and furniture appeared neither stable nor static. The central staircase in *Équilibre* (Balance) (all works 2022), one of the largest paintings on view, begs comparison to Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (No. 2), 1912. Rather than showing a body in motion, however, Cherkit unhinged the whole room with the distinct twitchiness of the early chronophotography that originally inspired Duchamp and even eroded the boundary between inside and outside spaces. Mediterranean-style cement floor tiles and wood-paneled walls establish *Équilibre* as an interior, but farther up is a wrought-iron lantern that would typically hang on the exterior of a building. Higher up still, a white-yellow orb set against a coral gradient is more suggestive of a sunset than a ceiling light fixture.



Équilibre (Balance), 2022, Oil on canvas, 90 1/2 × 70 7/8 inches

This disconcerting slippage between indoors and outdoors marked other works as well. In *Hat Tricks*, which depicts the same stairwell vestibule as *Équilibre* from a different point of view, the tiled floor faces off against an even more majestic pink-and purple-streaked sky. *Le complot* (The Conspiracy) depicts a crowded kitchen nook with a small table, two chairs, plants, an abandoned board game, and a disembodied hand holding a cigarette; a plastic bottle lies next to a puddle of water on the floor. And while elsewhere in this painting the floor appears solid, the area right around the spill is wet, wavy, and reflective. Like the ceilings that read as skies, Cherkit's floor dematerializes into the natural world.

As *Le complot* shows, Cherkit is a master of detail, but references to the canon of abstract painting confound

the overall realism in his work. In *Zone blanche* (White Zone), which depicts the artist's bathroom, the far right of the composition—ostensibly the shower door—is painted as hard-edge blue and green shapes that recall Ellsworth Kelly's studies of pure color and form. A long, orangey hallway in *Va et vient* (Come and Go), meanwhile, evokes Josef Albers's "Homage to the Square," 1950–76, in the way the composition is divided into rectilinear forms that appear to recede into space thanks to the interactions of specific colors. Just as he does with their realistic details, however, Cherkit uses the surface quality of his paintings to challenge their illusions of abstract space. So thick is the layered paint in *Équilibre*, for example, that the artist was able to carve the outlines of two bats into an early application of paint. The nocturnal creatures, now trapped behind a colorful interior that has been constructed around them, remind us that a parallel reality lurks beneath the painting's surface; the image we see is but one layer in time and space.