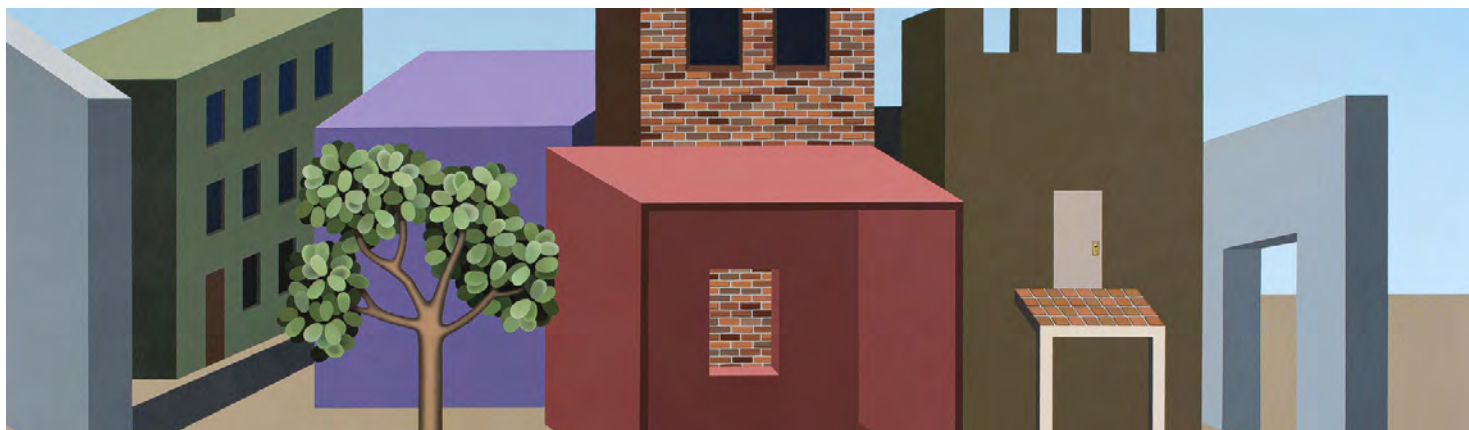


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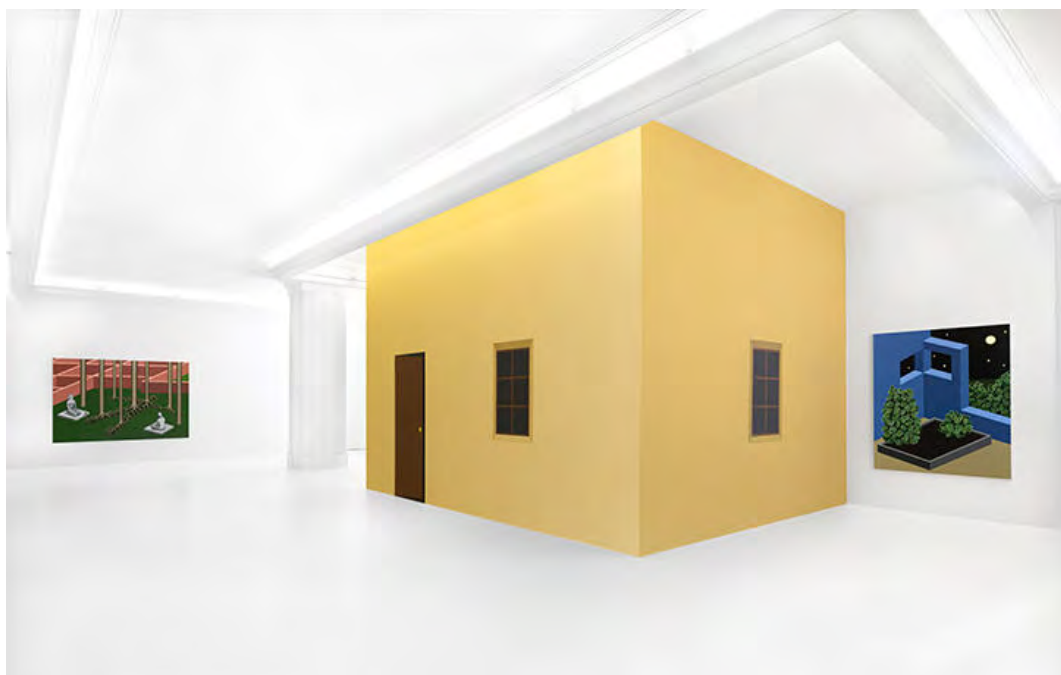
Emily Ludwig Shaffer Dissolves the Domicile

At Peres Projects, Berlin, the artist's new series dispels the limiting stereotype that women's identities are based on the home

BY ELIZA LEVINSON IN EU REVIEWS , EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 21 DEC 22



'In Stead of Me', Emily Ludwig Shaffer's first exhibition at Berlin-based Peres Projects, dissolves the domicile. In a new series created entirely within the last year, Shaffer unsticks the edges between the built and natural environments – opening the walls, if not tearing them down – with a captivating, sumptuous colour palette. Ethereal and ambiguous, these works depict dreamlike suburban and urban architectures, populated by monuments come to life, which bend the line between the familiar and the fantastical in a style that simultaneously evokes M.C. Escher and Alex Katz.



Featuring ten paintings and three in situ murals, 'In Stead of Me' is a multivalent examination of home, seeping beyond the four-walled structure of a house into the garden, the neighbourhood and the psyche. This is most powerfully articulated through the exhibition's site-specific untitled murals (all works 2022), in which Shaffer's visual language of bold, flat colourwashes and simplified, almost cartoonish windows have been painted

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directly onto three gallery walls. The murals' colours quote those of nearby works, suggesting a dissolution between the viewer's physical world and Shaffer's imagined one. The effect is a richly inventive and liberating redefinition of 'place' itself, one that stems from the image of home – and, by extension, the stereotypically feminine – but grows past it.



When Shaffer's paintings do feature people, however, the figures she depicts are exclusively female. Half of the paintings on display are populated by these stone-coloured humanoids, which appear almost identical, often in small groups, with almost matching physiques and no defining facial features. In *Dropping by* and *Sashay This Way*, the effect is heightened when the figures connect directly with one another through gentle physical touch (a hand on the shoulder) or a wave.



In *City of Lady*, the pregnant protagonist strides confidently between the green-blue tiles and maze-like walls of her narrow metropolis under a flat black sky of pinprick stars. Shaffer often plays with scale and, in *City of Lady*, the central figure is depicted as taller than one building and on eye-level with the rest of them. According to the exhibition materials, the work references *The Book of the City of Ladies*, a 15th century text by Christine de Pizan. In 1405, millennia before Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), De Pizan imagined her book as a deconstructed 'home' for 165 real and mythical women of influence, including Circe, Helen of Troy and Mary

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Magdalene. De Pizan understood her selected women and their overlooked stories as foundational materials to build a 'city of ladies', which, following the author's logic, exists – conceptually, at least – in the pages of her own book. By evoking this text, Shaffer cements a gendered reading of her work while, like De Pizan, implying that the city is not only physically fluid, but is also theoretically and temporally unbound.

With their metaphoric cities for ladies, both De Pizan and Shaffer go beyond the limiting stereotype that women's identities are based on the home or that art examining the home is exclusively 'women's work'. Rather, Shaffer's latest works provoke the question: If the home needs to be cut loose from sexist rigidities, who other than women should be the ones to sever those ties? The larger effect of 'In Stead of Me' is to unravel 'place' itself, an act that leans on the knowledge that there is, perhaps, no more symbolically loaded or instantly recognizable site for any of us than the home. While De Pizan's original work and Shaffer's contemporary iteration both connect powerfully to themes of gender, history and the domestic, 'In Stead of Me' offers a universal reverie: a space where everyone is free.

Emily Ludwig Shaffer's 'In Stead of Me' is on view at Peres Projects, Berlin, until 5 January 2023.