

FIVE TO WATCH

There is a lot of superb art being made these days.
This column by Brandon Rosas shines light on five gifted individuals.



POLINA BARSKAYA (b. 1984), *Morning in Florence*, 2023, acrylic on panel, 24 x 30 in., Monya Rowe Gallery (New York City)

In a world obsessed with the next big thing, **POLINA BARSKAYA** (b. 1984) dares to reclaim the dignity of the ordinary. Her intimate, diaristic explorations of family life examine and elevate the small moments that make up our everyday lives, challenging the Instagram-centric notions of presentability that prevail in modern society.

Born in Cherkassy, Ukraine, Barskaya has spent most of her life in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach neighborhood. From an early age, visiting museums was a regular part of Barskaya's life, as was calling herself an artist. She made her calling official as an adult by earning a B.A. in art from Hunter College and then an M.F.A. from Pratt Institute's School of Design.

Barskaya based her early paintings on photographs taken by family members but soon began taking her own photos for greater control of the creative process. "I have always felt most honest when working on something that I know well," says Barskaya of her autobiographical subject matter. "I like being able to work on something so intimate and personal, but at the same time, these are images that people can really recognize and see themselves in."

Indeed, it is Barskaya's unvarnished honesty that makes her paintings so relatable. In *Morning in Florence*, Barskaya's husband gazes up from the end of a messy hotel bed, his chin resting on a hand that holds

what appears to be a television remote. He wears patterned socks and an inquisitive expression, suggesting that he is waiting for the day's plans to either commence or be canceled for the warmth of the covers. Who has not been in a similar situation of waiting for a family member — uncomfortably, unceremoniously, yet not impatiently?

Works such as this follow in the lineage of Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard, leaders of the early 20th-century Intimist movement that lent its name to Barskaya's most recent solo show. Like these masters, Barskaya brings unassuming scenes to life with elaborate detail and carefully selected colors, but she also layers in a psychological tension that feels very much of our time.

Barskaya's works do not overwhelm with drama or spectacle but instead invite us to slow down and spend time with them, as one might with a cherished family member. This approach is striking a chord: Barskaya's solo exhibition of works created during the COVID pandemic was named one of the 10 "Best New York Art Shows of 2021" by *New York Magazine*.

BARSKAYA is represented by Monya Rowe Gallery (New York City).