

NEW YORK

The Best New York Art Shows of 2021

The art world has changed forever. But New York galleries still rule.

By Jerry Saltz December 20, 2021

4. Polina Barskaya, "Still," *Monya Rowe Gallery*



Polina Barskaya, *Bath Ritual*, 2021. Art: Courtesy Monya Rowe Gallery, New York

Monya Rowe, a teensy tenth-floor gallery on West 30th Street, keeps identifying mostly young, mostly women figurative painters whose work contains private truths and gravity. These artists share an intensity of mind, emotional depth, and radical vulnerability; they also share a higher love of painting. Their craft is focused but not fussy, always on the edge of being out of control. They seem to be trying to catch up to the speed of emotion while having to paint at the speed of materials, and the imbalance makes sparks. In addition to the work of Gretchen Scherer, who portrays imaginary ballrooms and museums filled with miniature pictures, Polina Barskaya's shares the same tremendous, collapsing density of emotion. Her paintings' sensuous surfaces rise above whatever the image is. Here, darkly colored and internally illuminated, her gnarly paintings show a woman naked with her child in the bathtub, in bed with her husband, or alone looking at herself in the mirror — a woman (often the artist), lover, mother, and painter on her own vision quest.

- Jerry Saltz