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Mathew Cerletty: 'Susan' at Albus Greenspon

By KEN JOHNSON

Albus Greenspon

71 Morton Street, West Village

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Viewers unfamiliar with Mathew Cerletty's art might take him for a realist painter of domestic subjects working in the Precisionist, photography-based vein of [Charles Sheeler](#). But ulterior motives animate the paintings in this slyly riddling [show](#).

"Ikea" is a color-coordinated still life of a narrow cabinet with flowers in a red glass vase on top. Golf clubs lean against its side, a black handbag hangs from a peg rack and a three-part scroll on the wall pictures an antique skeleton key. With its rhyming rectangles and circles, it seems mainly a conflation of realism and abstraction. But the title hints otherwise, and a glance at Mr. Cerletty's [Web site](#) reveals a penchant for social commentary. It reproduces a portrait of David Brooks, a columnist for The New York Times, and a Pop-style rendition of the distinctive, white-on-red banner of The Economist magazine. So, "Ikea" is subtly satiric: a cool-eyed study of an altarpiece for consumerist idealism.

The fittingly titled "Quiet Grace" represents a luminous, peach-colored room wherein a stepladder, a roller and paint tray and a luxuriantly wrinkled dropcloth covering the floor promise quasi-mystical transfiguration for the devout homeowner. An untitled abstract painting, a pastel-hued patchwork of spirals and other geometric shapes, is puzzling until you imagine it as a grace note in someone's perfectly composed abode.

What, then, about "Wall," the life-size, trompe l'oeil of a grungy, concrete block wall where a little wad of gum is stuck in a corner to the left? Maybe it represents the messy reality from which contemporary design offers spiritual protection.