

Won't You Be My NEIGHBOR?



After six years of flying solo in a home studio, the representational painter **HILARY PECIS** has disembarked for her Promised Land, a shared studio building in the heart of Frogtown.

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY **ALLISON BERG**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KATRINA DICKSON**

DURING GRADUATE SCHOOL FROM 2007 TO 2009 at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, Hilary Pecis was immersed in making cut-paper collages. It was not until after earning her MFA—and the freedom of being away from an academic setting—that she felt less pressure to make conceptually-driven work and began turning to her side practice of representational acrylic painting.

Around the same time, Pecis and her husband, artist Andrew Schoultz, packed up their lives and newborn son and relocated to Los Angeles in search of more affordable studio space and better schools. Upon arriving in her newly adopted city, Pecis, who was born in Fullerton, California, found herself grappling with new identities—as an Angeleno, a first-time mother and an artist. “I needed to totally remake myself,” confides Pecis. So, she ditched the collaging and dove into painting. Finding a studio became a low priority while performing an intense balancing act between art-making, motherhood and a job as a registrar at David Kordansky Gallery four days a week.

I have known Pecis since her name began appearing in my inbox on emails regarding invoices, installations and shipping. Still, it took me a beat in the summer of 2017 to realize that the workhorse assisting behind the scenes at Kordansky was the same person producing the vibrant *Desert Paintings* hanging in a solo exhibition at Halsey McKay Gallery in East Hampton. The saturated canvases of everyday objects and vacation scenes deftly exploring paint handling, color, line and pattern revealed the work of a talented emerging artist and hinted at exciting possibilities to come.

These days Pecis makes art full-time, and her practice continues to evolve. Using photographs she has taken as a starting point, Pecis depicts and renders images in a way that is familiar to her. It is in working between the history and trajectory of figurative painting that she finds limitless opportunities. “I can just paint whatever I want,” says Pecis with a relaxed smile. It’s a liberating feeling, she adds. “Within representation, there is a lot of flexibility. I can focus on landscape, still life and even include some abstraction.”

Now represented by three well-regarded galleries on both coasts—The Pit in LA and Manhattan’s Rachel Uffner Gallery, in addition to Halsey McKay—Pecis regularly sells out shows and every art fair booth. There is currently a waitlist for her work. She has just shipped a group of new paintings to Rachel Uffner for both a solo gallery exhibition and a booth at Independent Art Fair during New York’s Armory week this past March. Aptly titled “Come Along With Me,” the mix of still life and landscape compositions are based on Pecis’s experiences, travels through LA, her personal spaces and those of her friends. While appearing banal in subject matter, these somewhat autobiographical and colorful realist-meets-Pop renderings of objects and scenes depict the small details that give meaning to her everyday life.

With the rigor of a full-time practice came Pecis’s need to expand the scale and nature of her work—as well as her studio. Fortunately, painter and sculptor Ruby Neri recently discovered a sizable art studio building in Frogtown. She graciously invited Pecis and fellow painter Lily Stockman to join her, and all three artists are now flourishing in neighboring spaces with ample square footage, expansive walls, a gated parking lot and a loading dock.

“This building has every structural detail an artist could need, but the most important part of the entire situation for me is Ruby and Lily’s energy,” declares Pecis. “We all work very differently, but as a group, there is a great dynamic.” Neri creates large-scale ceramics; Stockman makes minimal abstract paintings, and Pecis continues her painted renditions of the seemingly quotidian, including art history books, flower-filled vases, textiles and the local liquor store and aquarium. All three utilize a plethora of color, and Pecis is convinced this draws an uplifting soulfulness into the space.

The women bring to the table varying levels of experience and insight into both art and life, and this new setting has already become a foundational hub for Pecis as her practice gains traction with a larger global audience. “Ruby has been working at a different level for a lot longer, and it’s helpful to see the way she sets up her studio,” Pecis says, before adding, “Lily has guided me with details like installing proper racks and tables.” As working mothers, they also share a special understanding of each other’s idiosyncrasies.

Together, they can’t help but have fun. For example, with the studios still in the finishing phases of construction during the Frieze week frenzy, the contractor had yet to install interior doors. As a result, they each ended up with triple the intended studio visits and embraced the festivities. “Yeah, no art was getting made that week,” laughs Pecis.

“Community’ has several levels,” says Pecis. “Within our building, it’s like a nuclear family. Then, there is the greater Elysian Valley area and the city of LA itself.” Pecis actively builds and fosters community no matter where she is. “There is a certain level of partnership and cooperation that goes into maintaining a community. It’s all about the exchange of inspiration,” she says.

On a glorious 78-degree morning this past February, Pecis’s studio environment is peaceful, both inside and out. She is creating amidst the quiet hum of a chorus of birds, the LA River and the nearby 110 Freeway. Though tranquil and understated, the surrounding Frogtown locale is culturally rich and full of inspiration. The river has officially made its way into one of Pecis’s paintings, and I am certain I can see the patterns, angles and colors of the local architecture beginning to emerge from her canvases as well. We luxuriate in the ability to explore and discover new favorite haunts as Pecis takes me on a tour of the neighborhood.

The WOMEN'S CENTER for CREATIVE WORK (WCCW)

This cool, progressive nonprofit and charming residential-feeling co-working space has a library and a print lab. The community here is very chill and welcoming to everyone—though the focus is on supporting women of color, those who identify as queer, trans or nonbinary and other marginalized folk. I went to a bingo night here hosted by Dynasty Handbag. It was oversold, so people were sitting on the floor. It was a great time and really fun to see all types of people come together to support a local cause.



WAX PAPER

The great sandwiches here are named after radio personalities on NPR. The Lakshmi Singh with seasonal vegetables on a baguette is absolutely delicious! Lily usually picks up from here and brings the food back to the studio for sharing because it's so easy to run and grab something without losing too much work time.



ZEBULON

I'm a very early riser, so I don't like to stay out late, but I do like to go to Zebulon. They have great bands and comedy nights that start on the earlier side. My favorite is a monthly show called Weirdo Night. If I'm there, you'll hear me cackling really loudly—and embarrassingly—in the back.

“There is a certain level of partnership and cooperation that goes into maintaining a community. It's all about the exchange of inspiration.”



SPOKE BICYCLE CAFE

Kid- and dog-friendly Spoke Bicycle Cafe serves my favorite cauliflower and farro bowl with feta and garbanzo beans—really hardy and flavorful. It's all-outdoor seating, so you can really take advantage of LA's year-round great weather and even spontaneously rent a bike on site! They work/partner with local farmers and vendors. In a community, it's extremely important to participate in the give-and-take however you can. I want to use my purchasing power to support community makers and local businesses.



La COLOMBE

I was thrilled to discover that La Colombe serves tea since I cut out coffee a long time ago—although if you offer me an espresso, I just might accept! I can keep to myself in a cozy chair on the beautiful patio overlooking the LA River Trail and distant mountains or hang with friends at one of the larger tables.

