



Claire Tabouret, *Tegyu in his soccer outfit*, 2020, acrylic on panel, 48 × 36".

## Claire Tabouret

NIGHT GALLERY

Where some of Claire Tabouret's older paintings represented groups (of debutantes as well as refugees) and couples (pairs of lovers, wrestling children), those hanging in her second show at Night Gallery mostly framed a single sitter in her signature loose, assertive strokes. With captivating immediacy, these works apprehend the mutability of expression as it plays across a face, registering pursed lips and shafts of light animating a cheek just so. "The Pull of the Sun" consisted of so many profiles of the artist's partner and friends, who seemed to pivot, instinctually, to the source of attention, in what, following the title's lead, came to read as a form of heliotropism—especially in the pictures whose subjects looked self-consciously posed. This made all the more remarkable the evanescent quality of Tabouret's depictions of, for example, children dressed in soccer uniforms: Three looked at her camera, and now at us; two were seated on a bench in a sideways position with their heads turned toward the lens, one

athletic-sock-ensconced leg bent at the knee and resting on the bench.

Indeed, before putting brush to canvas, Tabouret first took photographs, some spontaneous and others more planned. However, even in instances of the latter (as with the young athletes), the result is something more fugitive than this calculated approach would suggest; the pictures retain an elemental ambience that Tabouret redoubles pictorially by, say, extravagantly dappling passages of incandescence and shadows across the youth in *Terin (purple)* (all works 2020). Once Tabouret captured her sitters in photographs, she built up the ground of each panel from a fluorescent underlayer—evident in the crouching form of *Spenser*, underpainted with neon yellow—that pays off at the edges, where its acid-hued halo extends to the surrounding wall, mimicking the effect of neon backlighting. Despite this exaggerated, synthetic base palette and the obviousness of the camera's mediation, these pieces retain a sense of veracity that is not photographic so much as situational—they cannily convey the experience of being seen, an experience that emerges as the works' subject.

Another repeating image, of a Madonna-like mother and child, recognizably cast Night Gallery's owner, Davida Nemeroff, locked in an embrace with her baby (*Davida & Ora [brown]* and *Davida & Ora [orange]*). This repetition with technical and compositional differences meditates on the condition of variability itself, emphasizing that every study will necessarily lead to a different observation. Alongside what feels like formal play—most notably in four *Sachiko* works on paper, where the body was clearly a template—Tabouret reaches for something like mood, capturing not just semblance but personality. And she does this by insisting on keeping hold of the codes of portraiture (through the use of vertical framing and iconographic mainstays of the genre, not least the composition of a centered sitter). Her work is also legible within a field of ubiquitous figurative work that follows the recent and quite precipitous decline of so much self-same abstract painting, with its unending analytical deconstruction of the medium's materials and procedures. Often focused on the lives of those closest to the artist (frequently with the aim of redressing grotesque historical injustices in representation, though this is far from the case here, where the cast includes multiple attractive white Angelenos), adjacent figurative practices often eschew sentimentality for criticality. Tabouret's practice falls somewhere in the middle. She similarly insists on intimacy; her process facilitates a specificity of address, what she has described as an act of care between artist and model. Yet her approach is distinct in her tolerance for—even solicitation of—mawkish regard, an unapologetic pictorial radiance in which she and her companions bathe. The question becomes, Where does that leave the rest of us?

—Suzanne Hudson