

In *Looker*, Chloe West faces formidable questions around the politics of looking and histories responsible for rendering the body, specifically the female body, visible. West's current installation features her most recent paintings that derive imagery from the artist's observations of the figure and the objects she finds in the everyday environments she occupies. Despite the ubiquity of digital techniques today, West turns to traditional painting methods—mostly oil on panel—and subjects—such as portraiture, still life, and interior scenes—executed in a naturalistic style. "Through the intimate and laborious act of painting," West explains, "the work comes from a distinct awareness of the body in space and the gaze."

Her exquisitely wrought paintings usually depict fragmented views, seemingly isolated portions of a larger scene. Some works portray excerpts from the artist's studio or domestic space, including floor and window coverings. West creates near replicas of linoleum tiles and Venetian blinds, carefully depicting their material details. In these, photorealistic style intersects with abstract formalism, aligning West's pieces with Vija Celmins's precise renderings of the natural environment as much as with twentieth-century monochrome painting and its emphasis on surface. West often displays these works horizontally, setting paintings on tabletops and the floor, or suspending them so that they converse with their environment and blur distinctions between physical and pictorial space. Additional paintings focus on the figure, depicting bare feet from the calves down or hands resting across a nude torso cropped at the neck. In these, West meticulously captures the effects of light and shade to skillfully render the fleshy volumes.

West's attention to the play of light, convincing detail, and the portrayal of intimate, private settings, in many ways, points to seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish painting, in which these characteristics play a fundamental role. Although deconstructing and distilling them in her installation, she also references the quintessential components of Dutch domestic interior scenes—sunlit window openings, expanses of tile floor, intricately patterned textiles, and, of course, the female figure on view. In the seventeenth century paintings, emphasis is often placed on a woman's industrious hands busy with household tasks or bare feet as signifiers of her devotion to domestic responsibility.¹ In her paintings, West isolates these body parts, which have been objects of desirous voyeurism for much of art history, and re-contextualizes them alongside her "blinds" and "tile" abstractions, which in their flatness, block the gaze. In doing so, she problematizes traditional operations that have come to transmit entrenched formulations of gender roles and expression.

By committing to a resolute critical approach expressed via demanding painting techniques, West confronts the weight of art history while addressing ongoing issues surrounding who and what has the right to observe, surveil, and access the body and its space today. As art historian Lisa Tickner writes, "The body figures—how could it not?—but the question is how, what, when, and for whom?"² With *Looker*, West persists and continues to pose these urgent questions.

¹ See Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence* (Cambridge: The Fitzwilliam Museum in association with Yale University Press, 2011).

² Lisa Tickner, "Questions of Feminism: Question 1," October 71 (Winter 1995): 44-45.