

## PAUL SOTO

John Sandroni  
November 14 – December 21, 2024  
New York

“I love John’s art because it makes me think about choices, choice-making, the plenitude of choices. Why do people choose to depict the things they do? Choices are expansive and beautiful, but they are also muffled and scary. When one considers the expansiveness of choice and its relationship to representation, it’s easy or straightforward to imagine a beautiful result. If given the choice, I’d choose to see beauty. I’d choose to see vistas, sunsets, the swollen pistil of a flower.

In Elaine Scarry’s 1999 examination of beauty, *On Beauty and Being Just*, she explores and counters conceptions of beauty as apolitical, avoidant, and a distraction from more important issues. What I found equally resonant to her critical thought and investigations of beauty were her own choices—what she chose to cite as a beautiful thing. For example, a palm tree. The text examines the more traditional conversations around beauty (beauty as subjective) but also explores beauty as idiosyncratic and perhaps most importantly, peculiar.

I only began to love Valentine’s Day when I moved to New York. I became compelled and disturbed by the way the cloying holiday motifs merged with dismal February. The compelling relationship between these two things (signifiers of holiday, atmosphere of month) wasn’t just about color or formal qualities—it’s also about trash. February 15th is a day of purple and red and pink and peach colored trash, sometimes with deflated, luridly colored balloons laying on dirty cement ice caps like sad, poisoned seals. *February* depicts plastic wrapped candy-like bears, animals, flowers. John’s paintings of these things are so absorbing because they aren’t about happiness or gluttony or even for that matter, a straightforward commentary on consumption. John’s paintings of these mildly ambiguous but traditionally “sweet” objects are compelling because they feel like they are about trash. They are about the thin and disquieting gauzy packaging which floats away into a mid-February New York.

In writing this I asked myself this question: are any of these depictions beautiful? There might be a sense of traditional beauty, but when applied to any of the subjects depicted I’m tempted to replace beauty with less totalizing words like: fixation, attraction, interest. The singular floral arrangement in the show for example reminds me of a fake floral arrangement my mother created in 2002 when she told me that she had no time for real flowers anymore. I watched her thrust the stem of a flake flower into a disc of glue which lay at the bottom of a vase. The glue would later, she told me, harden and resemble water. It also calls to mind the type of floral arrangement procured to celebrate the opening of a coffeeshop in Brooklyn, which will soon, with a disappointing inevitability, close. I’m also reminded of the floral arrangement on the floor of a classroom inside of a Northeastern art college. The students painting it may not make art much longer, and the arrangement (and this is where I locate it, the arrangement’s, stoicism) knows this, and accepts its dreary and temporary function.

The representations in John’s paintings are effectively abstracted from their traditional associations: an arrangement of flowers without sentimentality or covert sexual connotations; Valentine’s Day ornaments without sweetness. One object in John’s world that *does* seem directly aligned with its beautiful-thing-ness are the blankets. The textiles are inviting and attractive and I understand intuitively why they hold an inordinate visual weight in John’s vocabulary. I believe

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that he quietly worships them. Textiles, blankets, and throws appear so at odds with the literal and singular female sitter of the show that my conviction that the blankets are the true feminine centerpiece is strong enough to make me uncomfortable.

If tenderness and sentimentality are removed from the objects and subjects—flowers, candy, the sitter (John’s own sister)—and dumped into the blankets, something tells me that these paintings are less about a reversal or perversion of symbols but actually a meditation on place. John is from New York. The show is in New York, and the show is about New York. John is negotiating familiarity, biography, and on some level working to insert enchantment back into his ordinary. One of my favorite conversations I had with John was when he came to California and showed me what he was working on. He had painted scenes from Los Angeles. Contrarily, they were straightforward and tender. Their cadence reminded me of my grandmother’s paintings, the ones she makes when she goes back to her home country, where she hasn’t lived since she was a little girl, and wistfully paints tropical birds and fruits.”

—Alex Goodman

John Sandroni (b. 1994 in New York) lives and works in New York. His works have been exhibited at Christian Andersen, Copenhagen (solo); Paul Soto, Los Angeles; Derosia Gallery, Fierman Gallery, David Zwirner Gallery, Theta Gallery, and Kai Matsumiya, all in New York; And Now Gallery, Dallas; and DREI Gallery, Cologne, amongst other venues. This is his debut solo exhibition in New York, and with the gallery.

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