

Review: Like No One Else: Alexis Pye at Lawndale Art Center, Houston

by [Doug Welsh](#) | March 5, 2023



Installation view of Alexis Pye's exhibition, "You really livin: A world that was always full of yellow sun, green trees, a blue sea and black people," at Lawndale Art Center. Photo: Ronald L. Jones

Alexis Pye paints in her own way, combining figurative, expressive and symbolic elements. She has cultivated a singular perspective on painting, informed by modernist and contemporary artists such as Cezanne, Manet, Matisse, Derrick Adams, and Sahara Longe, yet her works are constructed with a visual language that is entirely her own. Pye's exhibition, *You really livin: A world that was always full of yellow sun, green trees, a blue sea and black people*, currently on view at Lawndale Art Center, is further evidence of her visionary approach to painting.



(Left) Alexis Pye, “Be Like a Vase and Stay for a While,” 2022, oil, oil stick and oil pastel with embroidery, 48 x 36 inches; (right) “Spilled Tea is Not Only a Thing to Clean Up,” 2023, oil, oil stick and oil pastel on canvas, 36 x 36 inches. Photo: Ronald L. Jones

The title and conceptual backbone of this exhibition both emerge from “The Disturbances of the Garden,” an article by novelist and essayist Jamaica Kincaid, who wrote extensively about gardening. Plants, flowers and leaves are symbols that repeat throughout the show. They appear as lush and painterly forms, simple shapes, and as physical objects made with acrylic yarn. Often morphing into or partially shrouding Pye’s figures, the organic forms contribute to a sense of growth, regeneration, and abundance. For the artist, these natural elements are metaphorical of the joy, leisure, self-actualization, and gender expression within Black and Brown communities that have shaped who she is, and who she is becoming.

These paintings express feelings of joy and elation, in part because of their intricate construction. Pye pairs built-up surfaces with understated areas. She combines clumpy, sandpapery, and buttery applications of oil paint, oil pastel, oil stick, and acrylic yarn within a single painting. She layers warm and cool colors, and earthy and electric hues over each other, causing them to radiate in comparison. Pye often draws rudimentary symbols — the outline of a flower, a leaf, an eye, or a lightning bolt — directly on top of her extraordinary paintings, a risky and signature move. All of these complex and fearless decisions are part of why her paintings convey such powerful emotions.



Alexis Pye, "Self Portrait," 2021, oil, oil pastel, oil stick on canvas, 36 x 24 inches. Photo: Ronald L. Jones



Alexis Pye, "You Really Livin'", 2022, Oil, oil stick and oil pastel on masonite panel, 90 x 108 inches. Photo: Ronald L. Jones

I feel this especially from the diptych *You Really Livin*, comprised of two trapezoidal panels that create an exaggerated sense of perspective. Three figures inhabit an ambiguous space, which feels both internal and external. Organic shapes flood the confounding and dreamlike scene. The central figure leans forward, dripping in flowers, her body partially spliced where the two canvases meet, in a state of transformation or metamorphosis. For me, the magic of this painting is in its complexity, ambiguity, and myriad of possible meanings.

Alexis Pye paints like no one else, and no one else paints like Alexis Pye.



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You really livin: A world that was always full of yellow sun, green trees, a blue sea and black people is on view at [Lawndale Art Center](https://www.lawndaleartcenter.org/) through March 11, 2023.

<https://glasstire.com/2023/03/05/review-like-no-one-else-alexis-pye-at-lawndale-art-center-houston/>