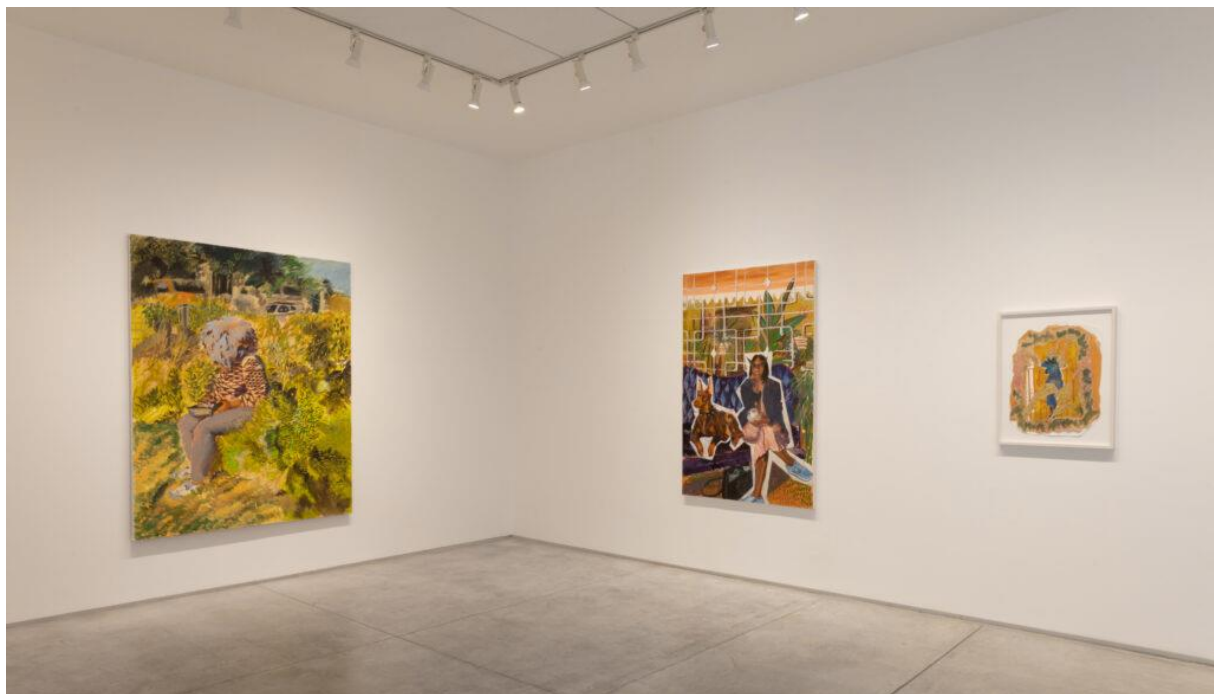


Proud Detroit Artist Embraces Houston, Tells Stories Of Young Black Women Who Are Survivors — Alexis Pye's The Girls Brigade

See These Powerful Works at the Bayou City's Inman Gallery

BY [ERICKA SCHICHE](#) // 07.03.24



An installation view of "Alexis Pye: The Melancholic Girls Brigade: The Lovers, The Dreamers, and Me," which will be exhibited through July 6, 2024 at Inman Gallery. (Photo by Caroline Philippone. Courtesy of Alexis Pye and Inman Gallery.)

The Great Fire of 1805 almost completely destroyed the city of Detroit. As a result, the city adopted a motto that highlights resilience, adaptability and transition: *Speramus meliora; Resurget cineribus* — We hope for better things, It shall rise from the ashes. This motto appears on the flag of Detroit and was once projected onto the Beaux-Arts neoclassical structure of the Michigan Central Depot.

Detroit-born, Houston-based artist Alexis Pye's body of work embodies this positive spirit. Through her character-driven art, she tells stories of young women who are survivors, and — as her latest exhibition statement states — “navigating breakups, interpersonal relationships, and balancing pragmatism with romanticism.”

Presented in “The Melancholic Girls Brigade: The Lovers, The Dreamers, and Me” exhibition, Pye's latest paintings and works on paper are on view through this Saturday, July 6 at Houston's Inman Gallery.

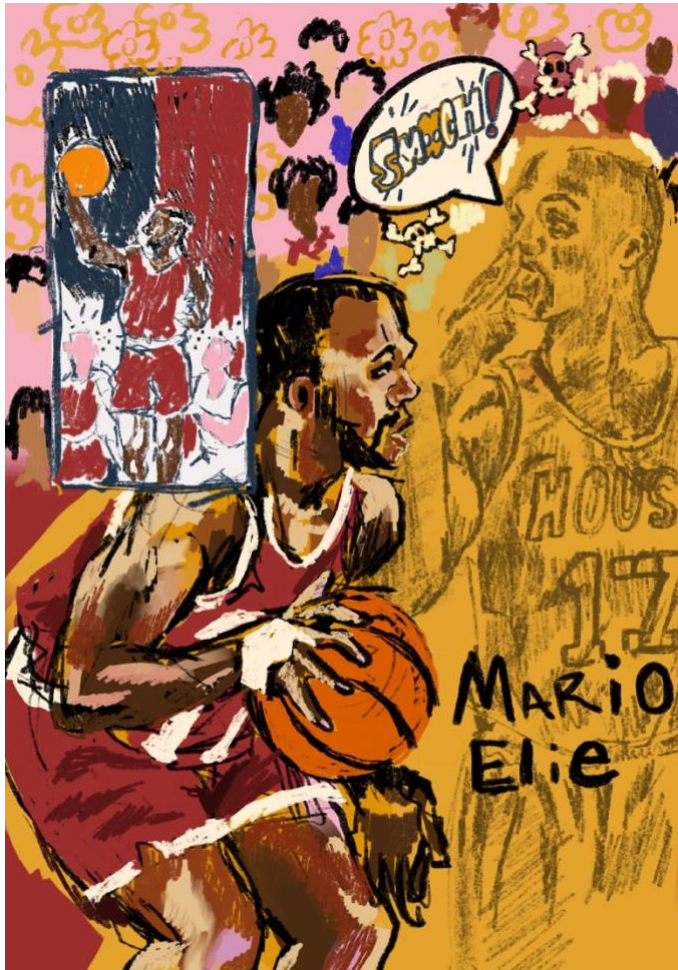


Detroit-born, Houston-based artist Alexis Pye's work has been exhibited at Project Row Houses, Lawndale Art Center, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Art League Houston and Inman Gallery, among other art spaces. She was recently selected to be a 2024 Skowhegan emerging artists residency fellow. (Photo by Bria Lauren. Courtesy Alexis Pye).

Through her art, Alexis Pye captures both the spirit of her hometown and a deep appreciation of her adopted city of Houston. During Pye's childhood and formative years, she grew up playing basketball and going to Detroit Pistons games.

She later channeled this appreciation for a collaborative project between Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and the Houston Rockets, which celebrated Rockets alumni during the team's 11 Remix Night games.

Artist Phillip Pyle II encouraged Pye to create an artistic tribute to Houston basketball hero Mario Elie. Pye's poster from the project is sold out, but the catalogue featuring all 11 artists is still available.



Alexis Pye's colorful poster tribute to Houston Rockets playoff hero Mario Elie was commissioned for a series of artworks celebrating Rockets players. The poster is now sold out. (Courtesy Contemporary Arts Museum Houston)

Pye's work has previously been exhibited in numerous art spaces. Her paintings and works on paper have appeared in Round 51 at Project Row Houses, the Lawndale Art Center, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Sheet Cake Gallery in Memphis. Just before her latest show at Inman Gallery, Pye's "Visions via Riding High" series was exhibited earlier this Spring at Art League Houston.

A graduate of the University of Houston in 2018 with a BFA in painting, Pye was recently selected for the prestigious 2024 Skowhegan residency program for emerging artists. Once she completes the

residency, Pye will join an illustrious list of Skowhegan alums including Houston artist Jamal Cyrus, Lee Bontecou, Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, Sanford Biggers and 96-year-old artist Alex Katz.

The Melancholic Girls Brigade

With “The Melancholic Girls Brigade: The Lovers, The Dreamers, and Me,” Pye explores everyday life and Blackness from the perspectives of young women.

Pye’s *Night Out* (2024) obliquely references Édouard Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882). Capturing a dimly lit, convivial bar atmosphere, she paints a scene of three friends enjoying time outside. Pye obscures the smiling faces of two male friends, while the woman stares ahead, somewhat stoically.

This feminine protagonist, grasping a coupe cocktail glass, evokes the energy of Manet’s enigmatic, expressionless barmaid. Pye’s painting suggests it’s all right for women to cherish the company of friends, but not smile while doing so.

Like other women featured in Pye’s paintings, she also possesses a sense of agency and an inimitable style. But she also takes respite from everyday life. Balanced against the weight of the times, the intrinsic and outwardly manifest beauty of radical, unapologetic Black Joy shines through.



Alexis Pye’s “Shawnice,” 2024. Oil and oil pastel on canvas. (Photo by Thomas DuBrock. Courtesy Alexis Pye and Inman Gallery, Houston)



Alexis Pye's "Night Out," 2024. Oil and oil pastel on canvas.
(Photo by Thomas DuBrock. Courtesy Alexis Pye and Inman Gallery, Houston)



Édouard Manet's "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère," 1882. Houston-based artist Alexis Pye was inspired by Manet's artwork while painting "Night Out," 2024. (Courtesy My Modern Met)

With *I'm Just Looking for the Truth* (2024), Pye specifically reinterprets Gustav Klimt's fin de siècle masterpiece *Nuda Veritas* (1899). Finished during the early days of Klimt's Art Nouveau gilded paintings phase, *Nuda Veritas* presents a nude apparition-like woman holding a mirror to the audience. Perhaps it functions as a reference to the Vienna Secession movement or the virtue of truthfulness itself.

Pye's self portrait gives her own unique spin on Klimt by presenting a curvaceous Black woman's body — an update to the Black Venus figure for the 21st century. She references Klimt's mirror, daisies and blue background, but as the title suggests, the search for the truth is even more pronounced.

Other works like the acrylic yaarn- framed *Stressed* (2024) and *Lost II* (2023-2024) feature young Black women engaged in deep thought and introspection. The painterly protagonist of *Shawnice* (2023-2024) sits, legs crossed, next to a doberman pinscher wearing a spiked collar. As with the paintings of contemporary Black artist Mickalene Thomas, the background of an elaborate Pye artwork is often just as intriguing (and complex) as the foreground.



Alexis Pye's "I'm Just Looking for the Truth," 2024. Gouache, graphite and pastel. (Photo by Jake Eshelman. Courtesy Alexis Pye and Inman Gallery)

Pye has also referenced the work of William Morris and the lesser-known Viennese design collective Wiener Werkstätte within previous paintings. Her work reflects an appreciation of nature and a narrative and thematic terrain similar to that of painter Jordan Casteel.

Musique Non-Stop

Although known primarily for her art, Pye also works as a DJ who founded Pink Plankton, an ongoing music project. Her unofficial exhibition playlist includes SZA songs, Stereolab's "Ping Pong" and Nina Simone's "Lilac Wine."

Pye continues the tradition of Motor City music innovation established by Motown, The Scene, Detroit Techno and J Dilla. But she does so in her adopted hometown of Houston. Her Project Row Houses installation, created in 2020 during the uncertain times of the pandemic, combined her love of music and art.

Don't miss this exhibition from a uniquely talented multidisciplinary artist on the rise.

Artist Alexis Pye's "The Melancholic Girls Brigade: The Lovers, The Dreamers, and Me" is showing at Houston's Inman Gallery through this Saturday, July 6. For more information, go here.

Schiche, Ericka. "Proud Detroit Artist Embraces Houston, Tells Stories of Young Black Women Who Are Survivors - Alexis Pye's The Girls Brigade." *PaperCity Magazine*, 3 July 2024.

<https://www.papercitymag.com/arts/artist-alexis-pye-detroit-turned-houston-impowers-black-women/#532820>