

Elisheva Biernoff *Elsewhere*

January 8–February 28, 2026
34 East 69th Street, New York



Elisheva Biernoff, *Advent*, 2025
© Elisheva Biernoff. Courtesy David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings by San Francisco–based artist Elisheva Biernoff at the gallery’s 34 East 69th Street location in New York, marking her first solo show on the East Coast.

This exhibition will span Biernoff’s career, featuring a representative selection of her intimately scaled paintings. Working with meticulous fidelity and care, the artist uses fine, luminous brushstrokes to create intricately painted depictions of anonymous photographs, which she sources from antique stores and online marketplaces. Biernoff paints on paper-thin plywood, replicating each detail and blemish, front and back, from the original object in a methodical process that is deeply deliberate and reflective; she only produces around four works each year. Individually mounted on handmade poplar stands, the resultant images exist at the nexus of painting, sculpture, and photography. Biernoff’s works are activated by the viewer’s close looking and emotional connection, yet they are also imbued with an inexorable sense of distance—a longing for another place, face, or moment in one’s life.

Also on view will be examples from Biernoff’s recent body of large-format multimedia compositions that explore the rich historical tradition of the trompe l’oeil. Inspired by vintage paint-by-number sets, the multipart *Road Not Taken* (2024) comprises nine sculptural paintings of bucolic open roads that are

based on photographs shot by the artist and her friends and family. While nodding to the pleasant, nostalgic aesthetic and commercial kitsch of the scenes found in these do-it-yourself paintings, the work also draws a parallel between the democratization of imagemaking proffered by both these craft kits and the medium of home photography. Other works in the show take the form of delicately painted assemblages, such as *Fragment* (2024), in which a painted postcard of a twelfth-century stone carving is affixed to a faux wood panel using a handmade ceramic pushpin; the artist includes faded rectangles in her painted rendition of the wood surface, suggesting the existence of other images that are lost yet might one day be rediscovered. Exploring the slippage that occurs between the experience of reality and the memories that remain after the fact, Biernoff's poignant and visually captivating paintings serve as, in the artist's words, "reservoirs of time."

Biernoff writes in a statement for this exhibition:

As a child, I loved looking at my parents' old photo albums because they could bring me face to face with people and places from the past. That's the real magic in photographs—but it's a limited magic, like a Cinderella spell that stops working at midnight, because photos also make you aware that a moment is gone, out of reach.

I never met my father's parents, who died long before I was born. The photo album was the only place I encountered their likenesses. Seeing their features and expressions in such a partial, remote way was frustrating; I wanted to know more than a photo could possibly record and deliver. That tension—connection tinged with deprivation, a contact that constantly recedes—continues to draw me to old snapshots.

In painting found photographs, I become absorbed in one instant of someone else's life, something deep, individual, and specific, but also something I relate to, that's open and universal. The project started out of an impulse to rescue these mysterious and sympathetic castaways that are so small, and so full of poetry. I'm interested not just in the imagery, but also in the photograph as an object, as something that can be held and turned over.

In choosing a photograph to paint, I always look for an element of the unexpected, something that comes at beauty sideways. Sometimes that takes the form of an unusual vantage point or shift in focus, while other photos reveal overt mistakes in the photography or development process: fading, light leaks, emulsion lifting off. The interruption afforded by these outtakes intrudes so completely on the picture that it becomes a subject in its own right.

The paintings are slow and quiet and take many months to make. Unlike the original photographs, with their bursts of chance, everything in the paintings is purposeful, meticulous. However, technical fidelity for its own sake is not my goal. The goal is to create a moment of perceptual doubt, to raise the question, "What am I looking at?" And that is only possible if the paintings are as close to the photographs as possible in both detail and size. I want the experience of seeing them to be slightly disorienting, like meeting a twin—familiar and unfamiliar at the same time—so that it jounces you, and asks you to look again.¹

Elisheva Biernoff (b. 1980) was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She received her BA from Yale University, New Haven, in 2002 and her MFA from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco, in 2009. She also studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London. Biernoff lives and works in San Francisco.

Recent solo and two-person exhibitions of Biernoff's work include *Smashed Up House After the Storm*, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco (2024); *Reservoirs of Time*, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno (2023);

Starting from Wrong, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco (2021); *Paintings*, Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco (2017); *Without, Within*, Walter Philips Gallery, Banff International Curatorial Institute, Banff, Alberta, Canada (2015); *Lost and Found: Elisheva Biernoff and Floris Schönfeld*, di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, California (2014); *Look Out*, Eli Ridgway Gallery, San Francisco (2013); *Folly*, Triple Base Gallery, San Francisco (2010); and *2x2 Solos: Elisheva Biernoff*, ProArts, Oakland, California (2010).

Biernoff's work has been featured in group exhibitions at museums and institutions such as *Don't! Photography and the Art of Mistakes*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2019); *Post-Postmodernism ≠ Utopia*, Haifa Museum of Art, Israel (2016); *Starting from Scratch*, Handwerker Gallery, Ithaca College, New York (2015); *Anti-Grand: Contemporary Perspectives on Landscape*, Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art, University of Richmond, Virginia (2014); *Artists + Editions: A Publication in Memory of Steven Leiber (1957–2012)*, Legion of Honor, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (2014); *State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now*, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas (2014); *L O V E*, Montalvo Arts Center, Saratoga, California (2014); *Work In Progress: Considering Utopia*, Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (2013); *Proximities 1: What Time Is It There?*, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2013); *That's What I Figure*, Kondos Gallery, Sacramento City College, Sacramento, California (2013); *Through That Which Is Seen*, Root Division, San Francisco (2012); *The Artists' Postcard Show*, Spike Island, Bristol, United Kingdom (2012); *Better a Live Ass Than a Dead Lion*, Eli Ridgway Gallery, San Francisco (2011); *Residency Projects II*, Kala Gallery, Berkeley, California (2011); *Route 2: Undisclosed Destination*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2011); *Almost Outlines: Math Bass and Elisheva Biernoff*, 2nd floor projects, San Francisco (2010); *Some Days Honey, Some Days Onions: The Works of Elisheva Biernoff & Leah Rosenberg*, Elizabeth S. & Alvin I. Fine Museum, Congregation Emanu-el, San Francisco (2010); and *Front and Center: Weather Stream*, Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California (2010).

The artist's work is held in permanent collections worldwide, including the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, New York; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno; New Orleans Museum of Art; Philadelphia Art Museum; Richard L. Nelson Gallery & Fine Arts Collection, University of California, Davis; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

Notes

1. Elisheva Biernoff, artist's statement, 2025.

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