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ArtSeen

Shannon Cartier Lucy: The Loo Table

By [Jason Rosenfeld](#)

ON VIEW

Lubov Gallery

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New York



Shannon Cartier Lucy, *The Autopsy*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 34 x 44 inches. Courtesy Lubov Gallery.

Shannon Cartier Lucy's nine oils occupy two rooms in Lubov's fourth floor space, in its airy perch above Chinatown's Kimlau Arch. The streetwise cacophony here gives way to domestic intimacy, of a quietly compelling kind. Born in Nashville, Tennessee, Lucy has only returned to artmaking over the past few years after multiple different lives—as an undergrad at NYU who pursued an art career in the city before moving back to Nashville to kick a drug habit, giving up art, and

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earning a Master's in Psychotherapy from the University of Tennessee. She claims to be still learning how to paint, after training in other media and that long layoff from artmaking. Writers and the artist herself often cite growing up with a schizophrenic father when discussing her work's predilection for unexpected juxtaposition. That is evident, to a degree, but the recent pictures present less pat stories and oppositions, and strong connections to 19th-century European art.

There are two works from 2018 and the rest are from this year. *A New Pack* (2018) is an overhead view of four pairs of white panties lined up on a worn wool rug, like arrows with the tapering crotches pointing right. The delicate details of the carpet weave are finely worked and equivalized to the canvas's own fabric. The fringe of the rug comes close to the lower edge of the canvas but does not quite touch, locating our vision in space, making us feel as if we can almost see our toes poking into the scene as we admire the new pack in formation. Across the room is *Dinnertime (Self-Portrait)* (2018), and now it is the artist on a similarly decorative rug. She sprawls on the right, on her stomach, an overturned black wooden chair framing her buttocks, as if its front legs gave way and pitched her forward. She wears a white jumpsuit with a yellow sash at the waist. Her hair occludes her face. In the upper-left section are fragmentary, headless views of her startlingly nonchalant parents. The father is in profile but represented only by a section of his right arm from brown-sleeved elbow to hand, the top of his left hand, and a bit of his right leg. The mother sits primly and facing out at the far side of the table with her hands clasped, in a gray robe and a white blouse. The tabletop is set with a silver tea service, a small white flower in a squat vase, salt and pepper shakers. Bright light from casement windows behind the couple brings the table's still life elements to glittering life. The creamy treatment of the off-white tablecloth and glowing tone recall naturalist art of the late 19th-century, interiors by Nordic artists through Munch or British painters of the Newlyn School. The psychological impact of the flailing

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girl, struggling to hold herself up like the old woman in Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World* (1948), is more contemporary in its thrust. Yet the picture seems to lie in the realm of the British "Problem Picture" made famous by artists like John Collier and William Quiller Orchardson, who offered narrational pictures without literary referents to an avid Victorian/Edwardian art public who delighted in trying to tease out a story from the scenes. But those tales tended towards distressed lovers or issues of class and gender rather than emotional and physical torture. Lucy treads in more malevolent realms of the female experience.

Near the windows is *The Autopsy* (2021), a startlingly direct view of a Dalmatian on a cockeyed mortuary slab, bloodlessly peeled open to reveal its organs. But for the exposed viscera, the dog could easily seem asleep. The most sanguine element of this inertly horrific image is the dog's thick red collar. In the more recent work, Lucy is less concerned with textures and materiality—the brushwork is thin and only generally descriptive, giving the subjects more agency. Across from this stilled doggy life is a still life titled *Threading Blackberries* (2021), featuring a red table with a crisp white cloth bisecting it from front to back. There is a small plate of peanuts at center right, perilously positioned on the front edge, six blackberries threaded with a needle and a spool of thread, a tray of green tomatoes, a bunch of grapes, and a highly reflective red Asian vase with a menacing golden dragon motif. The background is black, as in Zurbarán or Cotán, but Manet is the leading light here.

In the rear room is a portrait format work titled *Artist with Huckleberries* (2021), where she poses behind a round table strewn with the red fruit and channels the pose of Virginie Gautreau in Sargent's *Madame X* (1883–84) at the Met. In *Girl at the Loo Table* (2021), a juvenile version of Lucy cuts some unidentified plated food with a cartoonishly overlarge knife and fork, like a shrunken Alice in Wonderland. She is flanked by two glass vessels holding water that

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are marked by lovely geometric abstract reflections, as against the straightforwardness of the girl's depiction. Loo tables were 18th-century versions of round-topped card tables that could fold up for storage. The table surface when folded upright could also serve as another painted element in the room. The duality of purpose—a gaming venue and template for visualized fantasies—parallels Lucy's pictorial and thematic strategies.

Nature comes into play in *Loblolly Pine* (2021), a closeup of a pinecone floating in a glass of water with a flattened and benedictive hand hovering above the lip, and *Wasps and Bramble* (2021), also blown up, wherein one of the buzzing insects has alighted on the left side of a bethorned branch and another, at the right, is caught in midair, seen impossibly clearly while in flight, above a vessel filled with liquid whose edges glisten from light from an unseen source. This is the strangest work in the show. Its pleasure lies in the gentle blend of hues, the consistent overall tone, the air of non-surrealist inexplicability. This is consistent in these mundane tableaux, in Lucy's flitting from genre to genre in the same musical key. She has asserted that "painting for me is a repetitive, meditative practice that helps keep the crazies away."¹ The practice is repeated, the results blur into an overall sameness, but the quizzical subjects intrigue, strengthened by their lack of easy comprehension. Lucy's worlds are not particularly enterable, nor alluring, but they linger, even after one re-engages with the teeming city below.

1. Interview with Taylor Dafoe, Artnet News, August 27, 2020.

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Jason Rosenfeld Ph.D., is Distinguished Chair and Professor of Art History at Marymount Manhattan College. He was co-curator of the exhibitions *John Everett Millais* (Tate Britain, Van Gogh Museum), *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (Tate Britain and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), and *River Crossings* (Olana and Cedar Grove, Hudson and Catskill, New York). He is a Senior Writer and Editor-at-Large for the *Brooklyn Rail*.

<https://brooklynrail.org/2021/11/artseen/Shannon-Cartier-Lucy-The-Loo-Table>

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