

BERNHEIM

LOUIS EISNER

Puzzled Panther

BERNHEIM, ZÜRICH

17 September - 29 November, 2026

Bernheim Gallery, Zurich, is pleased to present *Puzzled Panther*, a solo exhibition of New York-based artist Louis Eisner. The exhibition comprises eight new paintings; three medium and large-scale canvases and five intimate works on copper plate from his new series, united not by subject but by atmosphere.

The exhibition takes its title from the central canvas: a portrait of the artist's brother, stretched across a sofa. *Puzzled Panther* is domestic in its staging and unsettling in its effect, a painting that watches the viewer as much as it is watched. It is the emotional pivot of the show, characteristic of Eisner's method, the subject is somehow related to him, to his personal taste and interests or to his life, but this attachment does not resolve the looking into comfort. The puzzle remains.

Eisner's process on the canvases begins with photography and ends with what photography cannot do. He shoots, he distorts digitally, he prints the resulting image at home; letter-size, on an inkjet machine that leaves behind its own evidence: the faint drag lines of the print head, chromatic stutters, the misaligned register of color planes. These marks of the printer's particular mechanical personality are not corrected out of the reference. They are painted in, faithfully, as though the technology were a collaborator whose idiosyncrasies deserve the same fidelity as any other visual fact. In this Eisner aligns himself with a lineage of painters who have used reproductive mediation; the xerox machine or the laser print estrange the image just enough to make painting it feel necessary again, his approach romanticizes the tool not as something to be pointed at but rather as something which points towards another truth, our visual experience, being a mental construct, is subject to many layers of distortion as we process images through our own subjective delusions. What remains after distortion is something closer to memory than to document: not what was seen, but the residue of how it was held.

The three canvases are hung in artist frames: black, with a characteristic oval crest that has appeared in previous exhibitions as a kind of recurring architectural signature. The shape is at once antique and graphic, a gesture toward the portraiture tradition that the paintings simultaneously inhabit and quietly refuse. Eisner's surfaces are built in a technique he applies consistently across the full body of work: the entire composition is first rendered in oil, in grisaille, as an underpainting that achieves full tonal resolution before any color is introduced. Once dry, color is applied over the black and white underpainting in transparent glazes, each layer calibrated for the light it will admit and the depth it will contribute. The result is luminosity that reads as both optical and tactile, color that seems to emanate from within the paint film rather than to sit on its surface. The largest of the canvases, an interior green room, is where this glow is most insistent, the color, similar to what happens in the paintings of the Color Fields master is not decorative but pressurized, it is both the atmosphere and the architecture of the painting.

The five works on copper plate constitute a separate chamber of thought that opens, on reflection, into the same room. Each is a painted transcription of a reproduction: a page from an art history textbook - Cézanne's still lives, Corot's *Girl Reading*, Artemisia Gentileschi's *Susanna and the Elders*, Titian's *Entombment of Christ* - rendered in oil on copper sheeting as thin and supple as paper, at the dimensions of the printed page it depicts. The white margins of the book layout are preserved. The works are presented unframed, mounted on a thin cleat invisible from the front, so that each plate appears to float a breath away from the wall, as pages levitate when one opens a heavy book quickly.

The choice of subjects is telling and refuses easy allegorizing: Cézanne's obsessive, structuring attention; a girl reading, absorbed; a woman subjected to the gaze of men and painted by a woman who understood that gaze; Christ lowered from the cross. These are not arbitrary selections from the canon. They are the images one returns to, the plates one has folded and unfolded until the page softens. In Eisner's treatment, the canonical is quietly, insistently reframed as personal ephemera, something worn through handling, intimate through repetition, meaningful because it has been carried rather than because it has been authorized.

Wallace Stevens, in one of his most crystalline lyrics, described the condition of total absorption in a text: The reader became the book; and summer night / Was like the conscious being of the book. His poem "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm" circles the idea that the deepest reading is indistinguishable from the experience it describes, that the scholar's attention perfects the thought it receives. Eisner's paintings aspire to something similar: not illustration, not quotation, but absorption. The reproductions he paints are not citations. They are the pages the artist leaned over, wanted to lean, wanted much most to be / the scholar to whom his book is true.

Just in the same way as André Malraux went on to create the "Musée Imaginaire", to put together all the images of art that have shaped our thoughts, to describe the impossibility to see an image in a book, an artwork in a museum without recalling all the other works of art seen or experienced, Eisner puts the viewer in the middle of his imaginary museum. The eight paintings in *Puzzled Panther* are, at their most literal, images of a green room, a brother, a landscape, some fruit, a girl with a book, a man taken down from a cross, a naked lady. At their most expansive, they are an account of what it means to live among images; to be shaped by the reproductions one grows up with as surely as by the people, to find in the touch of ink on paper or the skew of a printer head some correspondence with the elusive, indefinable moment of the experience of being.

Louis Eisner (b. 1988, Los Angeles, CA, USA) lives and works in New York, NY, USA. He has recently had a solo exhibition at The Journal Gallery, New York, NY, USA (2026); Bortolami, New York, NY, USA (2025); Galerie Pepe, Mexico City, Mexico (2024); Winter Street Gallery, Edgartown, MA, USA (2024); Peana, Mexico City, Mexico (2023); The Fireplace Project, East Hampton, NY, USA (2023); Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris, France (2022); Manual Arts, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2022); The Journal Gallery, New York, NY, USA (2021); Lock up International, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2018); Howard St, New York, NY, USA (2015); Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels, Belgium (2014); Jan Kapps, Cologne, Germany (2014); +1, New York, NY, USA (2013); Ritter / Zamet, London, UK (2013); Half Gallery, New York, NY, USA (2013). Eisner's work has also been exhibited internationally at institutions and galleries including Hall Art Foundation, Reading, VT, USA; Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin, Germany; David Lewis Gallery, New York, NY, USA; James Cohan, New York, NY, USA; Almine Rech Gallery, New York, NY, USA; Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium; Fondazione Museo Pino Pascali, Polignano a Mare, Italy; Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK; and Marianne Boesky, New York, NY, USA. He received a BA from Columbia University, New York, NY, USA (2010).

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