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# Larry Madrigal

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## Larry Madrigal

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Larry Madrigal (b. 1986, Los Angeles, California) is a Mexican-American artist who lives and works in Phoenix, Arizona. At the end of the 90's Madrigal moved to Arizona with his parents and since he was a child he was attracted to drawing, a medium that offered him to explore and show the "unknown" between reality and fiction. As a teenager he ventured into graffiti, perhaps motivated by the same concern but with new perspectives. It was during his university studies that Madrigal decided to be an artist with active cognitive practice, which enable him to complete a Bachelor's and Master's in Fine Arts at Arizona State University, in Tempe.

In the search for his own artistic language, intentional or not, Madrigal's works are characterized by urban figurative portraits and more intimate scenes of everyday life. Curious about the chores of contemporary life and with a traditional pictorial style, he also shows interest in different ways of life, cultures and anthropology. The story moves between chaos and order, with a sense of formal freedom that ephemerally borders on theatricality and drama. His empathy for the human beings behavior allows him to delve deeper into themes such as family, interrelationships, responsibilities and routines.

His work has been exhibited at the Phoenix Art Museum, Tucson Art Museum, Wausau Museum of Contemporary

Art, Wausau, WI, and more recently at Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles, with the exhibition When You Waked Up the Buffalo. Madrigal has obtained important recognitions, grants and awards such as the AXA XL Art Prize (2020) and the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Scholarship, Montreal, Québec, (2017, 2018, 2020).



# Dirty Mirror

Silkscreen print, 37.2 x 29.5 in (94.5 x 75 cm)  
Produced on 300 g 100 % cotton Canson paper

Edition of 50.



We are happy for our first collaboration with artist Larry Madrigal.

*Dirty Mirror*, is a limited edition of 50. Is a silkscreen print, 37.2 x 29.5 in (94.5 x 75 cm). Produced on 300 g 100 % cotton Canson paper.

Through portraiture and figuration, Larry Madrigal's work investigates cultural identities and ways of life. The story is restless and curious and appropriates intimate scenes whose visual orders share scenes with chaos and routine.

Each element is identified with actions and circumstances that human beings go through in their environment, such as paternity or maternity, rest and coexistence.

# **Living life, painting life** **– an interview with** **Larry Madrigal**

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*by Julia Bachmann*

**Your first solo exhibition *Scattered Daydream* was recently shown at the Nicodim Gallery in Los Angeles, at a time when we are all still affected by Corona. In the paintings we see a kitchen, a living room and a bed. Do you make this connection between the scenes in your paintings and the scenes that are all too familiar to us at the moment?**

Before the pandemic, I was already focused on intimate and quotidian imagery that spoke to other aspects of the human endeavor, from my own perspective. The pandemic only intensified this focus when I began working from home and found myself overly saturated with the subject, so much so that it became almost unbearable at times. There was no escapism. For example, I would walk over from my kitchen to my studio, and make a painting of myself in the kitchen. You see, there was no way out. This particular moment only enhanced my contemplation over the nature of our daily rhythms. I think the cycles of cleaning, eating, sleeping, working, and playing contain timeless secrets.

**Your paintings show, in great detail, what seem to be unmentionable situations. Situations that are not commonly talked about because they are considered either too embarrassing, too tedious, or just a part of daily life to which nobody usually alludes. When did you find yourself first drawn to these types of situations?**

As an incoming MFA student in 2017, I was determined to make work with some cultural or political commentary given the social polarization of the nation at the time. Many artists can testify about academia's role in ushering painters into thinking about their work in these social and political terms, as they are expected to defend their ideas within a specific lens.

The big shift for me happened when my daughter was born just two weeks before the MFA program. The urgency of daily responsibilities gradually turned my attention away from the critical and into my own internal struggles. Questions about the

meaning of being a father, student, husband, and painter took hold of me. It forced me to pay more attention to quotidian moments and think more creatively about them. It also helped me maintain a healthy distance from the 'contemporary discourse' which, in my opinion, can dilute an artist's true inner impulse in exchange for the currently approved justifications for figurative representation. So, I carefully thought about not thinking, and really tried to not try. I started depicting instances of seemingly inconsequential imagery and infused those moments with the spiritual and psychological.

**The paintings seem to show your point of view: situations you experienced but that most people can relate to: we all go down the street to buy groceries; once in a while we buy new clothes; and we might look at ourselves in a mirror that we are cleaning. Do your paintings tell a story for everyone or do they tell your story specifically, whether others might relate to it or not?**

Relatability is a byproduct of making what feels most honest. I think individuals are simultaneously unique and not unique. So, although people may not relate to specific interiors or figures in these paintings, there may be an abstract association with the idea of responsibility, of fear, of insecurity, of love, of family, and so on. For example, when a comedian tells a successful joke, we don't laugh because we remember the exact situation specifically. Instead we laugh because we understand the essence of the premise and condition presented. I like the challenge of making very personal work transcend my individuality, and I find that being as honest as possible is one big step in that direction.

**Do you ever cheat yourself into another role through your paintings — in order to tell a story that you haven't actually experienced yourself?**

The short answer is no. But, I do allow other stories to enter my work through a kind of periphery as I come across new and different things. Instead of making myself a protagonist, I try to be honest with my reactions to things. I don't think we ever

truly understand otherness of any kind, all we can do is respond to it. The response can say a lot about our attitude towards other stories. So I'm not really concerned with accurately representing a moment. As a painter, all I can do is respond to life with honesty and transparency.

**Sometimes there's a lot going on in your paintings; sometimes there's a quietness in them, as in good morning. Sometimes we find both those elements in one scene. Besides the objects in your paintings (i.e. books, dolls, gadgets) and the story they might tell, it's also about how the protagonists react to what is in the painting.**

This is one of the most exciting things about narrative painting to me. Nothing in the work is neutral. Everything is associational. As I work to build these images, there are times when I become extremely sensitive to the 'objects' depicted. They can become witnesses or characters in the unfolding of a story. The rhythm, proximity, and articulation of moments all work together to support an intangible feeling. For example, a child is usually associated with innocence, therefore, if that innocence is juxtaposed with taboo, it can cause an interesting reaction. I feel like a scientist pouring different imagistic symbols in a test tube to see what happens. This of course has its own pitfalls, as a narrative painting can become overly obvious or saturated with cliché. So I try to be more nuanced about it.

**In a way, the openness and humour in your work uncovers the seriousness of the situations. You let people into these hidden, personal zones and tell stories others probably would prefer to forget than have captured on a canvas.**

Going back to the idea of representation, subject matter is either immediately expected or scrutinized when painting figuratively. During grad school, I was wrestling with what makes a painting seem important, or what it means to make an important painting. I tried to go the opposite way and depict the most non-important scenarios. I quickly realized how

important those moments really are. Hollywood would never depict a superhero doing laundry or cutting toenails (laughs). But it is those moments that say a lot about us. I believe behind closed doors, we are a lot more similar than we assume. But only those closest to us get to see our weaknesses. So I realized that love is the only place where I can allow myself to be simultaneously pathetic and assured. In a way, my paintings are really about love.

**You told me about the painting that hung on the wall in your grandmother's house which subconsciously moved you to become a painter. Do you see your paintings and your prints hanging in the rooms of others, influencing their lives?**

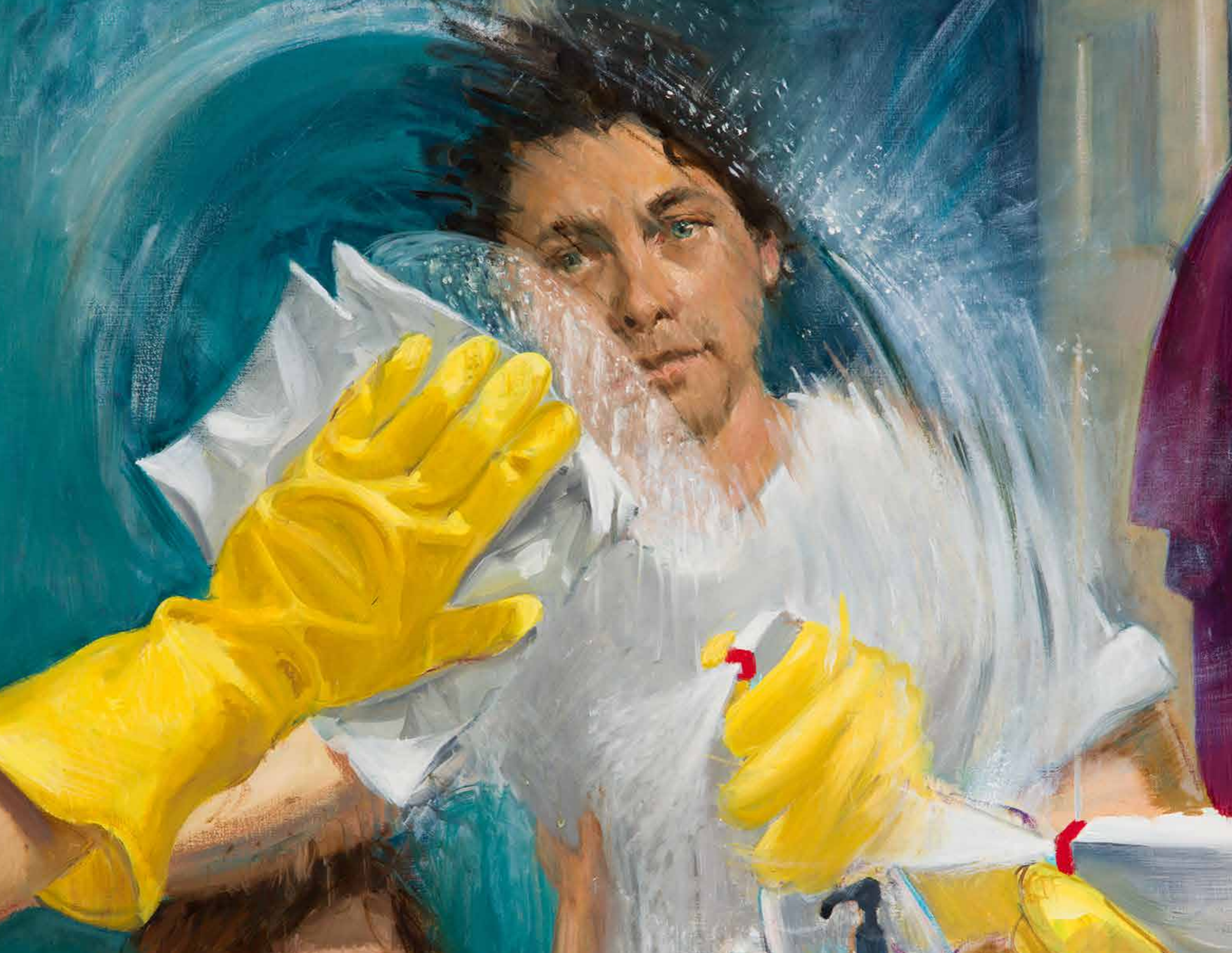
The funny thing is that I always assumed these paintings would be with me forever. Now that they are making their way across the country and abroad, I am interested to see how their new life will be. Wherever they are, they are a real part of my soul and I hope they add something special to either a home or collection. If there is any influence from my work, I hope it's in the mere sense of love for the drama of life.

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LARRY MADRIGAL





# Press

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28/10/2020

Larry Madrigal: Sacred reflection in the middle of ordinary routines



## ON ART AND AESTHETICS

The domestic, the ordinary, the mundane—certainly, there is no dearth of these subjects in the visual arts. Painters will pluck objects from their homes—apples, flowers, a cup, a book—and attempt to cast them in a new light. More often than not, such experiments do not yield extraordinary results.

But there's something very fresh about the way Phoenix, Arizona-based Mexican-American artist Larry Madrigal elevates that which is commonplace. He freezes onto the canvas not mere objects but little narratives, a style that renders his work particularly delightful.

Mom, with keys in her hands, is ready to rush to work while dad and baby are still asleep. At night, when mom and baby are resting in another room, a hungry dad opens the fridge, Coke bottle, cereal bowl around. A canine couple copulate somewhere in a background, a bird drinks from a pool upon which sails a paper boat. A bra lies near the sofa. Inspiring affection, these scenes—that present the thrill, pressures, weight and chaotic splendour of modern urban family life—mirror the very existence of the viewer even though they are derived from the artist's personal experiences.

Larry writes beautifully: “The mundane reminds me of our commonality and the relatable nature of the human experience. Ordinary routines are infused with issues of identity, responsibility, ambition, and purpose. I see the commonplace as an arena for sacred reflection on the complex nature of being, and a platform to explore painting's power to promote empathy and wonder.”

Larry sees the world as a “meaningful and precarious venture”. He is interested in the daily rhythms of life, and how they are entangled with timeless dramatic themes and connected to the overall human struggle.

The work also explores the issues of being an artist in a context where political, social and personal expectations are present altogether. The artist continues: “Essentially, my work deals with balance, both visually and conceptually. This is especially true in a day where constant

deciphering of information and ideas cut through our daily lives. I am also inspired by comedy, and its common use of familiarity to reveal deeper and more complex realities that are overlooked or not fully considered.

“Thus, I paint scenes such as morning routines, fitting rooms, domestic activities and other seemingly unimportant moments, that when suspended, reveal hidden questions about the human condition. I often depict myself in these situations as a form of self-portraiture and display of vulnerability. My work also reflects my own internal crisis of masculinity.”

Larry was born in 1986 in Los Angeles. He recently completed his MFA at Arizona State University. His work has been featured in the exhibitions “When You Waked Up the Buffalo”, Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles (2020); “Painting the Figure Now II”, Wausau Museum of Contemporary Art, Wausau, Wisconsin (2019); and “Body Language: Figuration in Modern and Contemporary Art”, curated by Julie Sasse, Tuscon Museum of Art, Tuscon, Arizona (2017). He has been a finalist for the 2018 and 2020 AXA XL Art Prize and a recipient of the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Artist Grant. His first solo exhibition, “Scattered Daydream”, opened with Nicodim Gallery in September 2020.





16/03/2019

A Phoenix Portrait Artist Channels The Old Masters

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There's something really powerful about the face," says artist Larry Madrigal, a Phoenix painter who has been gaining a reputation as a portraitist of uncommon skill and depth. In his oil paintings of family, friends and self, Madrigal combines technical flair with a deep humanity. With his carefully observed and rendered details—tactile skin, emphatic gazes and casual gestures—his work hints at complex lives. "Being able to capture my subjects on the canvas is very special to me," says the painter. "And there's so much to learn."

Although he drew his first self-portrait in ink around age 10, Madrigal became enamored with oil portraiture while studying the old masters as an undergrad at Arizona State University, where he's currently completing his Master of Fine Arts. "There's a sacredness in those older paintings," he says. "At their very foundation, there's this feeling of awe that we're in this world."

This sense of reverence comes through in all his paintings, including his many self-portraits. In the oil-on-canvas *Melancholia*, he echoes *Self-Portrait* by Albrecht Dürer, who, in 1500, daringly depicted himself in a full-frontal pose—then almost exclusively reserved for Christ. Like Dürer, Madrigal confronts his changing face as well as his evolving sense of self. "Growing up Mexican-American, I've always wrestled with identity," says Madrigal. "I'm always thinking, 'Who am I? What's the essence of me?' So, I found a kinship with his retrospective questioning of himself."

The artist's curiosity isn't only directed inward. When depicting friends and family, "I try to aim for the feeling I get when I see them—something about who they are," Madrigal says. "It's not just a likeness." In his "Sainthood" series, he conducted interviews and photo shoots with his subjects, all artists and activists "who are using their creativity to better their communities," he says. The final portraits, rendered in lush detail, sometimes portray the figures with faint halos, referencing classical paintings of saints. "I wanted to depict them in a way that monumentalized and ennobled them," Madrigal notes.

While the artist's early technical approach was also attuned to the

Renaissance—he used undetectable brushwork and thin glazes—lately, he says, “I’ve become interested in retaining evidence of the brushstroke. I want a little more gesture and movement.”

Recently, settings have taken on a greater significance in Madrigal’s work. Renaissance painting remains a touchstone, and he keeps a reproduction of *Las Meninas* by Diego Velazquez in the studio. But instead of the Spanish royal court, the artist memorializes modern life, as with his painting *The Madrigals*, which shows the painter at his canvas in a corner of a messy room with his wife, Melinda, and their toddler. The painting meditates on the constant “balancing of family and creative life,” notes Madrigal. But the work also insists on marveling at mundane moments. “It’s hard to take that kind of perspective in today’s world,” says Madrigal. “But I believe you can still find wonder.”



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