

“Fringe”  
Paintings by Charles Laib Bitton  
Opening: 26.10.24  
Exhibition: 28.10.24 - 30.11.24

This exhibition centers on the artist’s relentless pursuit of artistic discovery, where each painting is not merely an iteration but an independent exploration of a shared subject: a woman with a fringe. While each work is informed by the one before it, the artist ventures into unknown territories with every piece, pushing the boundaries of pose, expression, and technique. These works reflect the tension between control and freedom, the posed and the unposed, capturing moments where the mask slips and the model’s true self emerges.

The fringe, a literal and metaphorical curtain, plays a key role in this process. It offers both a shield and a threshold—a point of transition between the internal world of the model and the gaze of the viewer. In many ways, the series parallels the personal experience of growing a fringe: a liminal state, a space of transition, and self-conscious awareness.

At the heart of the series are *Seated Nothing I* and *Seated Nothing II*. These works present a minimalist, almost meditative focus on the subject, with each figure stripped bare of external distractions, plunged into their thoughts or a state of deep introspection. In *Seated Nothing I* (May-June), the model wears a simple white dress, her pale skin exposed for the first time to the early days of summer. Her face, already kissed by the sun, contrasts with her legs, still pale from being hidden through the long winter months. This contrast reflects a moment of vulnerability—her self-consciousness in revealing her legs for the first time in so long becomes a subtle but powerful expression of the tension between the self and the outside world. This vulnerability, enhanced by the simplicity of the composition, invites the viewer into a shared space of intimacy and introspection.

*Seated Nothing II* is a self-portrait and the only painting in the series not based on the model. Here, the artist places himself in the same pose, creating a companion piece that reflects on the artist’s own experience of vulnerability and self-awareness. Just as the model’s face contrasts with her legs, the artist’s own tanned face and pale feet, untouched by the sun, mirror this tension between exposure and protection. This self-portrait becomes an introspective counterpart to the model’s portrayal, with the artist

stepping into the role of the subject. By positioning himself in the same composition, the artist blurs the lines between observer and observed, making the act of painting itself an exploration of personal identity. Vulnerability, whether of the artist or the subject, remains central to the creative process in these works and is an integral part of the artist’s cultural proposal.

Two smaller oil-on-paper works, *Portrait Study for Seated Nothing I and Distractions*, further develop this theme. Though based on the same pose as *Seated Nothing I*, these studies present a diversity of interpretations. Each portrait feels distinct, as if representing different individuals, revealing the fluidity of identity and perception. These works echo the artist’s exploration of portraiture as a process of continual reinvention, where no single image fully captures the complexity of the subject.

Where *Seated Nothing I and II* reflect a purifying process—paring down to the essential elements of presence and thought—*Distractions* engages in a visual conversation with the complexities of external life, as if the artist is grappling with the world beyond the quiet self-reflection of the other works. In *Distractions*, the figure sits at the center of the painting but is no longer in a space of quiet meditation; instead, she must negotiate with the external world, full of objects, light, and distractions. This painting becomes a layered exploration of how interior thought is constantly interrupted by the external, creating a sense of tension between stillness and activity, simplicity and complexity.

The color palette of *Distractions*, with its warm, earthy tones and oranges, reflects the terracotta floors of the exhibition space, linking the painting to its physical context and making the viewer aware of the relationship between the work and its surroundings. The natural light that fills the painting mirrors the conditions of the gallery itself, as though the light in the space were an extension of the light in the painting.

Together, these works—*Seated Nothing I*, *Seated Nothing II*, *Distractions*, and the smaller studies—form a narrative that spans the quiet internal world of the individual and the more complex, shifting relationship between subject and surroundings. The artist’s exploration is not in the creation of a formulaic style, but in the relentless push to discover something new—something deeper—with each work. Every painting could inspire its own body of work, yet together, they present a journey of discovery, of moving beyond the surface and into the complex space of identity, vulnerability, and creation.

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