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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in May

By Martha Schwendener, Will Heinrich and Blake Gopnik

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This week in Newly Reviewed, Martha Schwendener covers Tamiko Nishimura's arresting black-and-white photographs, Tanya Merrill's playful portraits and Enrique Martínez Celaya's link to a Spanish master.

Tanya Merrill

Through May 18. 303 Gallery, 555 West 21st Street, Manhattan; 212-255-1121, 303gallery.com.



Tanya Merrill's "Our family portrait/Dancing over the town," 2024. Tanya Merrill, via 303 Gallery, New York

I was showing someone an image on my phone of the titular canvas in Tanya Merrill's "Watching Women Give Birth on the Internet and Other Ways of Looking" at 303 Gallery and they asked, "Is that a thing?" (i.e., women giving birth on the internet). Well, of course it's a thing: Everything's on the internet, just as for thousands of years, painting was the clearinghouse for representing human experience, from the birthing of babies to memorializing deaths.

Nine paintings are here, and they offer astute, playful depictions of how we look at the world today, through art history and newer digital means. There is a painting of a woman on the couch with a laptop; another with a Venus-like pregnant woman taking a selfie; and a zany composition of human and animal skeletons hovering over a village that harks back to pictures of people confronting death or pandemics.

The show's title feels important, too. "Ways of Looking" conjures, for me at least, John Berger's seminal book, "Ways of Seeing" (1972), based on a BBC television series. Berger looked at the social and political systems that produced, for instance, a Dutch portrait, rather than merely marveling over its surface.

Merrill is more lighthearted than Berger, but the laptops and computer keys lined up like tiles in her paintings remind us that ways of looking are determined not just by social and political elements, but also by the technology that surrounds and conditions us.