

**New
American
Paintings**

Jim Torok: Walton
At Lora Reynolds Gallery

Brian Fee
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I keep thinking of Caroline. I have never met this Caroline in person, nor have I visited Walton, the town nestled in the Western Catskill Mountains in upstate New York where she resides. And yet, when regarding her portrait — the middle image of seven same-sized, intimately scaled paintings in Jim Torok's Walton exhibition at Austin's Lora Reynolds Gallery — I feel as though I "could" know her. Like I've seen that faintly sun-streaked brown hair, those indescribably blue-grey eyes somewhere before. Or I could know one of her neighbors, Yanna with her fuzzily textured tartan scarf and ice-water eyes, Iskander the kid, his T-shirt a mottled non-pattern like a painted Easter egg, whatever's hanging from the string around his neck hidden beyond the boundaries of the painting

It's not that Caroline or any of the others necessarily stand out from one another. The seven works are all nearly identically scaled (roughly five inches by three and three-quarter inches, with a inch-thick base) on sanded birch panels. Torok's subjects exist in approximately the same central location in the frame, though Caroline seems to sit a bit closer and Yanna a bit further. Their backgrounds are all identically featureless, though the hues fluctuate between sky blue (Yanna) and cool ecru (Jos, his few days' old stubble contributing texture) to Caroline's rich vegetal green and Iskander's profound gray-green. Each emits their own elegant glow, undoubtedly due to Torok's deft application of paint and glazes, though the bespectacled figures particularly shine, like the soap-bubble rainbows trapped within Nel's glasses.

Torok photographs his subjects many times under natural light in his studio, then paints from these photographs, swapping out one shot for another practically daily. Thus the end result, after months of delicate paint layerings, is a more natural likeness of that person, rather than a copied photograph. Torok splits his time between Brooklyn and Walton, and his upstate neighbors continue a series from Williamsburg, Brooklyn's Pierogi Gallery (You Are a Vibrant Human Being, spring 2010). That exhibition bifurcated between his photorealist, quiet portraiture and seemingly improvised, wildly colorful cartoon-like abstractions. Walton's sublime septet stand strongly alone here, without their gestural kindred, as their restrained representations (coupled with their subjects' unfolding histories) play well against Colby Bird's durational output (Dust Breeds Contempt) in the other gallery.

Jim Torok: Walton (his fourth solo exhibition in Austin) is on view at Lora Reynolds Gallery until October 15. The artist returns to the gallery on the evening of October 1 to discuss his work. Please check the gallery's website for details.

Brian Fee is an art punk currently based in Austin, TX. His culture blog Fee's List covers his three loves (art, film and live music) occurring in his other three loves (the Lone Star State, the Big Apple, and Tokyo).