

WORKPLACE

The University of Minnesota
'what moves between – 2022 MFA Exhibition Catalog / "Hollow"
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Christina Schmid



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Shadow in the Room, 2022, oil on canvas, 8x10 inches

Hollow

Text by Christina Schmid

Julia Maiuri's paintings draw on an archive of film stills gleaned from horror movies and television programs such as *Goosebumps* and *The Twilight Zone*, shows designed to raise questions about the possible, probable, and uncanny. Rather than the blood and gore of spectacular CGI-enhanced monsters, it is the moments when the ordinary shifts and gives way to the inexplicable that the artist is drawn to, the liminal spaces when what has been taken for granted slips into something unfamiliar, eerie, and ominous. Domestic spaces, especially bedrooms with their air of vulnerability and privacy, feature prominently in her work, as do ever watchful eyes. They widen in surprise or fear, cast sideways glances, stare apprehensively, and meet our gaze in a semblance of alarm. Elsewhere, hands reach for doorknobs, about to open and reveal what lurks behind closed doors. Together, the paintings dwell in a state of not yet and linger at thresholds, where the sense of threat is still an intuition that has not yet materialized into the shape of an actual intruder. A deep sense of uncertainty pervades the work, a mood that congeals into a dense psychological space and thickens into a palpable atmosphere. Nothing reads as explicitly scary and still a sense of unease, of premonition, prevails.

Visually, the intimately scaled oil paintings and gouache drawings invite close viewing. They suggest a particular choreography of encounter that demands a proximity that could make viewers feel like voyeurs, peering through keyholes and witnessing moments not meant to be shared. The paintings' size also conjures life amid a global pandemic, as unprecedented restrictions on studio access made many artists retreat to their homes. Many creative practices along with choices of scale proved adaptable to enforced domesticity. But in Maiuri's oeuvre, the home is already under siege, haunted by mostly invisible specters that are not quite alive and barely dead, on the cusp between the imaginary and the disturbingly real. In a way akin to horror films' mediating the anxieties of the zeitgeist – from atomic proliferation to genetic engineering – Maiuri's paintings reverberate with the amorphous angst of early pandemic days.

The scenes the artist captures are first composed as digital collages. They overlay images but, unlike cinematographic fades, never reveal which image recedes and what is about to come forth and into focus. The paintings hover in this state of in-between, the logic of cause and effect suspended, time held in abeyance. Maiuri's palette offers no clues either. It is deliberately scarce, drawing on complimentary colors that come together only in moments of heightened tension: Pink and green hues combine to dramatic effect in *Shadow in the Room*, where the presence of an intruder becomes more than intuition, a silhouette visible against a bedroom wall.

Maiuri mines the visual tropes of suspense – doppelgangers and moments that induce a double-take and déjà-vu, the vertigo of not knowing who to trust, or the tell-tale glint in the eye of a character not yet infected by a lethal alien parasite – to create exquisitely cinematic paintings. Their oneiric quality hints at the deeply personal dimension of the work, but the paintings steer clear of both narrative closure and autobiographical revelations. Maiuri's layered compositions and her deft handling of the medium create an intrigue that is as seductive as it is subtle.

Christina Schmid is a writer, critic, scholar, and curator. She works at the University of Minnesota's Department of Art, where she teaches contemporary practices and critical theories. Her essays and reviews have been published both online and in print, in anthologies, journals, and digital platforms including Artforum, Flash Art, Foam Magazine, afterimage, and martists.com.