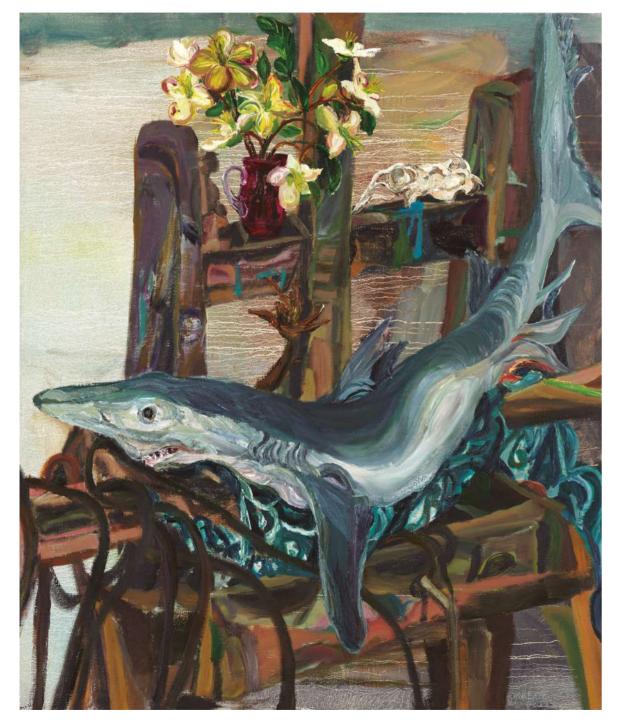
If there's actual "beauty" in Miller's paintings, it emerges slantwise, cradling a studied awkwardness of composition in refulgent color.



Nick Miller Baby Blue, 2020-21, oil on linen, 127 x 107 cm

Lynne Tillman

Beauty isn't important, but everybody talks about it. It is important but not in the way everybody talks about it. Beauty can't be defined, so it can't be talked about, since no one knows what they are saving or what they mean when they use the word "beauty." It cannot be defined, because it is not stable, it changes over time. People make subjective judgments, which also change over time. People change over time and with the times. In one time, something was considered beautiful. In another time, it is not.

Beauty has no standards. Gold was once a standard. Beautiful to some and not to others. An uneven hem, an uneven face, beautiful, and

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Martin Herbert

to-me, time-lapse imagery of nature reclaiming our post-human planet in Alan Weisman's 2007 book The World Without Us) of an unpredictable resurgence Nick Miller's work is a Taoist-inclined twist on the that we ourselves will never apprehend. What we memento mori tradition, often involving painting have, meanwhile, is the pricking beauty of, in gallerthings recently deceased but not yet decaying. ists' parlance, "a last chance to see," in the way so Arrangements of cut flowers halfway to drooping, many terminally ill people report an experience of men at the end of their lives, the occasional interloper re-enchantment, reality belatedly aglow. In the like a beached baby shark. If there's actual "beauty" face of these conditions, art's historical determinain his paintings, it emerges slantwise, cradling a studtion to insist on material permanence in relation to ied awkwardness of composition in refulgent color the ostensibly beautiful – Dutch flower painting, say (beauty needs imperfection, the beauty mark, to - isn't necessarily a good fit for a potential extinction moment. Other art models, either emergent or humanize it); a simultaneous relationship to and awkward distance from traditional still-life painting; and, recently established for a seemingly unvoiced, ulteprimarily, the bodily conveyance that what's beautiful rior reason, seemingly align better with transience: here has at least one foot out the door. You can get digital generative practice and (particularly undocbeauty-adjacent qualities like prettiness without foreumented) performance might constitute both boding. But beauty, it seems, needs to hurt a bit; unlikely bedfellows and apt groundings for incomis always saying, "Sorry I can't stay." ing artistic beauty, predicated as they are on things All of which you know if you've spent any you can't keep, on rehearsing relinquishment. time tending a garden, deadheading roses before But even if not, there may nevertheless be enough petals scatter: a perennial rhythm of goodbyes conbeauty, if terrible beauty, to go around. soled by the promise of next year's spring. If civiliza-

tion itself winks out, though, that consolation weirds, insisting we get used to the idea (as in the beautifulthere are many reasons, the face of the globe isn't symmetrical, for one.

People want different things, and to the great majority, need comes way before desire.

Beauty as an idea and an image is unimportant to a starving person. Food is beautiful then, eating and being fed. Some wealthy people starve themselves to look beautiful, and eating is anathema to them.

Beauty lives in a context, it is easily unbalanced. A beautiful car next to a desperate human being is ugly. Beauty cannot stand up to inequity, it always fails.

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