



'we read to feel we are not alone'. 2024 oil on linen 135 x 180 cm by Jess Allen

HOW DELIGHTFULLY BORING!

The world has erupted in such a loud and angry blaze that it's no surprise that a new vibe has emerged – aspirational boredom. *Glass* explores how the world of art and culture has taken it on board

Writer CHARLIE NEWMAN



Anne Rothenstein, 'Three Figures', 2023. Oil on canvas, 150 x 180cm (59 x 70 7/8in). Copyright Anne Rothenstein. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.



Breakfast with Banana, 2023 by Jane Brodie © Jane Brodie

To put it lightly, everything feels a bit much at the moment. Do you find yourself wanting to hurl your phone into the sea or a drain? To free up your calendar? To get back to basics? Well, you're not alone. In today's world of snappy catchphrases that capture the zeitgeist, "aspirational boredom" has emerged. It's the less toxic and twee sister of the cottage-core/trad-wife trend and a more supportive, less patronising friend to the quiet-quitting movement that retaliated against the hustle-hungry girl boss era of the 2010s. In plain speaking, aspirational boredom celebrates the small things in life, the little wins that keep us grounded amid the chaos.

After 10 years of dizzying success with her fashion and media blog, *Man Repeller*, Leandra Medine Cohen redirected her stylish and on-the-nose energy into launching The Cereal Aisle on Substack in 2020. In its quest for fresh, unedited ideas, Substack wants writers to be in charge, set their own rules and, most importantly, proceed at their own pace. Earlier this summer Cohen wrote, "The most pervasive yearning I can sense ... is for boredom as an aspirational condition. You need time to be bored, and time, they say, is our most valued resource, but there's more to it with this vibe shift. A nostalgia about the yearn-for boredom that feels like an urgent, almost painful longing."

In Jane Brodie's *Breakfast With Banana* (which was selected for the Herbert Smith Freehills Portrait 'award at The National Portrait Gallery), her friend Phil sits forlornly at the table, shoulders drooped with a fixed gaze and lost in deep thought. Brodie has delicately depicted the "very hard time" Phil was going through at the time of the sitting. We stand over Phil, looking down on her with empathy thanks to Brodie's interactive cropping. "I wanted to give the viewer space to enter the painting as well as giving Phil her own space within the painting," she explains. Brodie's gentle invitation casts our own minds back to when we, too, have felt the same. "There is a tension between the enormity of what she is going through and the familiarity of the breakfast." With a background in set design, Brodie has mastered the utilising of "a space to tell a story, even without a person present".

Growing up in the hustle and bustle of London and "having not stopped moving in my twenties", Brodie aspires "to not let life slip by without stopping to appreciate it". Nature and a quest for balance are integral to her being. Now in her thirties, she tells me she prefers mundanity to boredom and hopes to live a life "being present in the mundane and appreciating it – not letting it pass you by. I believe it's something worth celebrating".

Jess Allen also rejoices in aspirational boredom, labelling herself as "the typical sort of introvert" who relishes in "the ordinary quiet" from her home in remotest Cornwall. When painting she prefers total peace – no radio, no interruptions. While she doesn't "do mindfulness, I do concentrate on something when I'm making a painting of it". That something is often inanimate objects – books resting open upon a page, soft sofas crinkled with age, figures casting reassuring shadows on said sofa, people reading and napping ... Home and rest never looked so good than through the gentle haze of Allen's golden hued palette, inviting you in to pause and bathe in the "power of feeling sort of happy in one's own skin and in one's own kind of everyday existence". Initially, Allen solely painted books as still life objects "without any sort of metaphor or meaning". But she began to realise just how much they mean to people "because books contain ideas, they contain things we relate to". While the daily news fervently fans the flames of polarisation, Allen's work steers us to a more communal path: "All I can do I suppose with my life is live peacefully and generously and kind of making the most of my life in a good way."

London-based artist Ollie White also takes interest "in the small and incidental objects in life". Juicy red ballet flats, seductively glossy, jet-black platforms and plump crimson armchairs take on a whole new narrative under White's intense gaze. Like Allen, these objects "are not arbitrary", but on closer inspection they reveal "the often captivating, alluring and desirable qualities these chosen objects possess". You'll find your curiosity getting the better of you, wondering whose box-fresh shoes they are and what the secret story is behind them. His colloquial items are charged with a sense of urgency and being, though they lie vacant and abandoned. White is particularly interested in themes of isolation and emptiness, where observation and memory play an important part in his work. "I also explore 'otherness' in my work, often alluding to an anthropomorphic presence in the subject matter I represent," he adds.

Anne Rothenstein, 'Remains of the Wedding Breakfast', 2020. Oil on wood panel, 61 x 122cm (24 x 48in). Copyright Anne Rothenstein. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York.





The Green Restaurant, Oil on canvas, 15cm x 21cm, 2024 by Ciara Roche



Hotel Bath, Oil on canvas 100cm x 140cm, 2023 by Ciara Roche



If Only If Cabbages & Roses Collaboration



If Only If Cabbages & Roses Collaboration



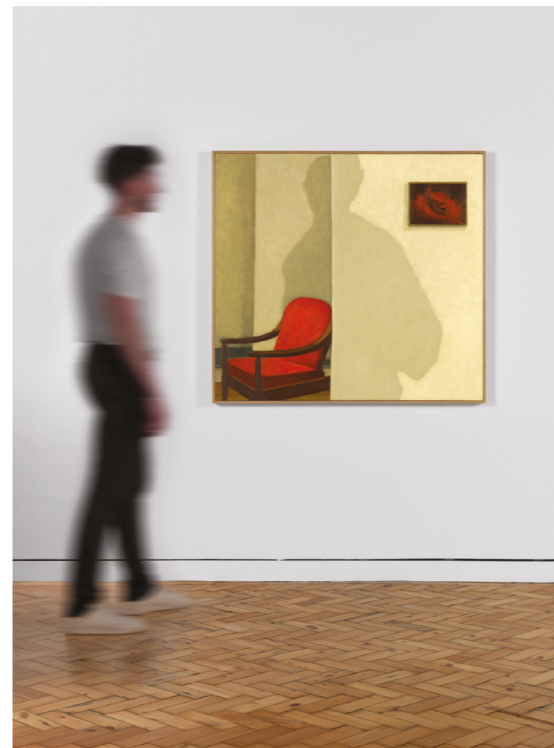
Red Shoes in Box, 40 x 30 cm, 2024 by Ollie White

We feel an overwhelming sense of presence in Irish painter Ciara Roche's spellbindingly stark scenes – prams parked at the edge of a room, the glaring screens of televisions in a shop window, aisles of women's products in a shop, an empty dining room, a public toilet. All of Roche's work is starved of people but rich in storytelling. Her deft application of paint and poetic use of colour jolt the senses. In *Rest Room* you can almost hear the squeak of a shoe on the sparkling clean floor; in *Mini*, the brand new rubber tyres; in *Off License 1*, the swoosh and thud of the door swinging open. These aren't necessarily places associated with excitement but they do feel somewhat nostalgic and we enjoy them for their simplicity. Her paintings nod to Edward Hopper's cinematic quality.

If Roche's work is an indie film, then London-based artist Christabel Blackburn's is more big budget Hollywood. In her vibrant and smooth canvases we observe people climbing stairs, leaving bathrooms, texting while walking. Blackburn describes herself as "hyper-observant. I am always curious about the life story of strangers. I will lose track of time watching and wondering about people." A lot of Blackburn's work depicts solitary figures because "as soon as you add more people to a composition it becomes about the story between them, rather than allowing the viewer to exchange places with the lone figure". Yet Blackburn's paintings don't feel lonesome but warm and jovial, like we're perched on an outdoor table at a local cafe watching the world go by. Her figures are going about their day-to-day lives at whatever pace suits them. Their amblings feel all the more aspirational thanks to Blackburn's bright colours and "lack of frenzied brushstrokes, so my paintings do not communicate any darkness. They're exploring the dichotomy we all experience in life, I want people to feel calm when contemplating them." The 2D lines and flat planes of colour give her work an added serenity and simplicity that feel easy to digest. Her practice aligns with the values of aspirational boredom: "The human mind craves space and that's partly what I'm aspiring to do in my work, creating a moment to step away from the chaos."



Stand Off, 2024, Oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm, 2024 by Ollie White



I Will Never Forget, Oil on canvas, 128cm x 148cm, 2023 by Jess Allen

Now in her seventies, Anne Rothenstein calls herself the founding member of aspirational boredom, preferring a life at home painting, listening to music or the radio and resting. As idyllic as this sounds, Rothenstein reminds us that "sadly this does not lead to the calm, anxiety-free life we are all in search of". Painting for Rothenstein is her "everyday action to counter the bleakness of reality and heartbreak going on out there ... But however good I am at isolating myself it's impossible not to be affected by it all; it comes creeping in, as if my conscience demands it, and before I know it a painting has suddenly become about refugees or raging fires." Her muted tones give her work a haunting, phantasmagorical essence – figures sit slumped with their backs to us, or stare out at us with an empty expressions on their faces. But it's not all doom and gloom for there's a dash of the "fabulous and frivolous" via her sitters' deep ruffled collars and sheer pleated skirts, looks that could have walked straight off Chemana Kamali's debut show at Chloé.

Clémence Poésy, Georgia May Jagger, Sienna Miller et al sat front row at the Chloé Fall 24 show, announcing before it had even begun that boho is definitely back. We didn't know we needed it until we saw the feminine ease of sheer chiffon wafting down the catwalk. It seems in times like these we aren't reaching for clothes symbolic of strength but pieces we can slip on from sofa to street – see Stella McCartney's or Burberry's take on faux shearling or Loewe's roomy camel utility trousers that look more akin to gardening than the catwalk. For lessons in aspirational boredom styling see Miu Miu's FW24 collection, where models padded down the catwalk in open-backed slippers, trench-coats that could be mistaken for duvets and oversized gloves that could tackle the sharpest of brambles. When you assess the recent fashion industry hits, they're the clothes of the past – Prada's deck shoes, The Row's jelly shoes, Bode hand-embroidered shirts, If Only If and striped Tekla nightwear that we can wear long into the day. They're seasonless staples that you can potter about in at home and in the garden. They're not look-at-me megawatt glamour but items we return to year after year for comfort and ease. What could be more aspirational than a forever wardrobe?



Jess Allen in studio, February 2024



Even the Shadows Are Full of Light, Oil on canvas, 128cm x 148cm, 2023 by Jess Allen



CHLOÉ FW24



LOEWE FW24



LOEWE FW24



STELLA McCARTNEY FW24



MIU MIU FW24



MIU MIU FW24



BURBERRY FW24



b chehayeb. Photo Courtesy the Artist and OCHI. Photography credit: KC Crow Maddux

The artist b chehayeb's works on paper hark back to childhood summers where the days of the week bleed into one and time is primarily spent outdoors, swimming, writing and playing or watching sports. Growing up under the sweeping sunlit skies of Texas taught chehayeb the importance of being "connected to the earth". Now living in New York, art offers her the

opportunity to tap back into her childhood self. "Because I make work about memory there is meditation and a lot of emotional processing already in the studio," she says. At The Armory Show in New York with the OCHI gallery and at London's Workplace gallery this autumn, you'll find chehayeb's great swathes of vivid colour interjected with swiftly depicted objects – bikini bottoms, cactuses, baseball caps, cigarettes. They are all moments of heady summers not forgotten.

Australian-born but living in London, Jess Cochrane also draws from the hedonism of summer in lively paintings where friends smoke, talk on the phone, snap pictures, lounge in pools and share food and drink together – a modern day Impressionist scene. For Cochrane "the best paintings throughout history are those simply capturing what it was to exist in that time and have done so with great joy". Indeed, there's a buzzing aliveness to her work that celebrates the shared experience. In response to the onslaught of depressing news, Cochranes finds "listening to the voices of friends and their experiences to be helpful in my understanding. One of the best things we can do is to gather with our friends and continue building our community, being open to others. To be together. I think we know that sense of community is beneficial to our wellbeing and helps create a space to process. In times that feel very polarising, I believe that togetherness is the greatest and most grounding protest of them all."

It's all too easy to romanticise the floaty and free foundations of aspirational boredom but, as Cochrane argues, "That's not to say there isn't discipline or rigour but there's a balance." She adds, "I don't know why or when it becomes sexy to grind yourself to the ground but I find myself talking about this with artists and writers more and more. We're all sort of realising that if we're not careful, stress and anxiety can take over and sort of mask as fuel for the work."

Work inspired by aspirational boredom elevates the beauty and strength to be found in the every day. Keep your deck/jelly/net clad shoes firmly on the ground and tinker, work and play in the delights of the day.

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