

MEMORY LANE

LIKE SUMMER-SOAKED SCENES FROM A VINTAGE FILM, LONG ISLAND-BORN PAINTER JESSICA BRILLI CAPTURES THE NOSTALGIA OF AMERICANA IN OIL AND ACRYLIC

BY EMMA FLOYD

In Jessica Brill's sun-drenched paintings, memory hums quietly beneath every brushstroke. With a style that draws on mid-century American Realism and echoes of graphic design, Brill captures the stillness of suburban life – cars parked in tidy driveways, anonymous figures at the edge of a pool, the geometry of 1960s architecture – rendered in a palette that seems faded by time.

A native of Long Island, Brill culls inspiration from her childhood surroundings. Her painted scenes – modest homes, clean-cut lawns, pastel Cadillacs – may not reference exact places, but they feel unmistakably familiar. “Though I don’t live in that setting anymore, I still feel a significant connection to it,” she said. That connection fuels her work: a pursuit of shared visual memory, filtered through personal nostalgia.

Before turning to painting full time in 2021, Brill built a career as a graphic designer at Harvard University. Throughout, she maintained a disciplined painting practice, eventually earning a BFA in painting from the University of Rhode Island and later completing a certificate in graphic design at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Her dual fluency in fine art and design



lends her paintings their crisp, composed sensibility – images that are at once cinematic and intimate.

Brill's process begins not with a sketchbook, but with a cardboard box of forgotten photographs. She scours antique shops, yard sales, and thrift stores across the country for discarded 35mm slides and old family photos – fragments of other people's lives that somehow reflect her own. “I view thousands of slides to find the ones that move me emotionally,” she said. “I’m constantly looking for photos that mirror scenes from my childhood, or that I feel a connection to through experience.”

That emotional connection is key. While her subjects are often strangers, the images resonate on a universal level. Viewers find themselves transported – not to a specific time or place, but to a feeling: of summer sun on pavement, the hum of a box fan in a ranch-style house, or the bittersweet glow of a fading photo album. The colors she uses often reflect the natural aging of vintage film, evoking a visual shorthand for the past: yellowed skies, soft shadows, warm overtones that blur fact with memory.

Influenced early on by the renowned Realism artist Edward Hopper's quietly dramatic tableaux, Brill shares his affinity for solitude and stillness. But her work also contains a softness, a warmth, and often a mystery: who are these people? What became of them? And why do we feel like we've seen them before?

One of her paintings was recently spotted in the series *Your Friends & Neighbors*, hanging in the apartment of Jon Hamm's character, Andrew Cooper – a fitting placement, as Brill's work continues to seep into the cultural landscape in subtle, compelling ways. In 2021, she received a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation and has since exhibited internationally.

Through unearthed photographs and painted memory, Brill invites viewers to join her in revisiting a shared American past – one framed not by exact dates or locations, but by emotion, color, and quiet familiarity. ■

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