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Amy Pleasant at Jeff Bailey

Taking her cue from film and animation storyboarding, Amy Pleasant, a young painter based in Birmingham, Ala., employs the classic modernist grid to chronicle everyday life. Using a palette of muted beige, ivory, black and pale gray, she breaks her canvases into loose, interconnected squares that are inhabited by cartoonlike figures, mostly painted in black silhouette. Each square represents an isolated scene in a narrative, but because their borders are loose rather than hard-edge, the scenes seep into one another.

A central figure in *Uncoiling* (2002) is a woman seated on the corner of a bed, in the act of either dressing or undressing. A man lies on the same bed, his body covered by a blanket. Another figure stands in a light-drenched doorway. There are additional sleeping figures, their legs and feet sticking out from under blankets, their arms dangling over the sides of beds. Other figures who have been partially painted over look as if they are trying to sneak into the story.

Another canvas, *Waiting* (2003), features a predominantly beige grid, broken by translucent areas of gray or ivory. The painting is filled with people idling time away: some stare out of windows, others stand at curbsides. Empty windows seem to be awaiting the return of one of Pleasant's protagonists. Doors and windows are recurring images in the artist's universe – they seem to represent the archetypes of dreams and memory, the passage of time, coming and going, ennui.

Occasionally, Pleasant does away with the grid, instead filling the painting with billowy, smoky plumes of color. This happens with *In the Back of a Car* (2003), where a romance is apparently being recalled. In various areas, a male and female figure appear together and separately, evoking, perhaps the awkwardness and naïveté that comes with dating in youth. Other figures barely peek through a cloud of gray-blue color. One scene shows a woman examining her naked body in a mirror, perhaps coming to terms with her own eroticism.

Amy Pleasant: *In the Back of a Car, 2003,* oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches; at Jeff Bailey Gallery

Pleasant's flair for storytelling is in line with that of contemporaries such as Marcel Dzama and David Shrigley, while her dynamic painthandling relates more to works by someone like Amy Sillman. Full of existential angst and loneliness, her paintings are able to evoke an empathetic response from the viewer.

- *Max Henry*