

ARTSEEN | FEBRUARY 2026

## Julia Fish: *Transcriptions, Apparitions*

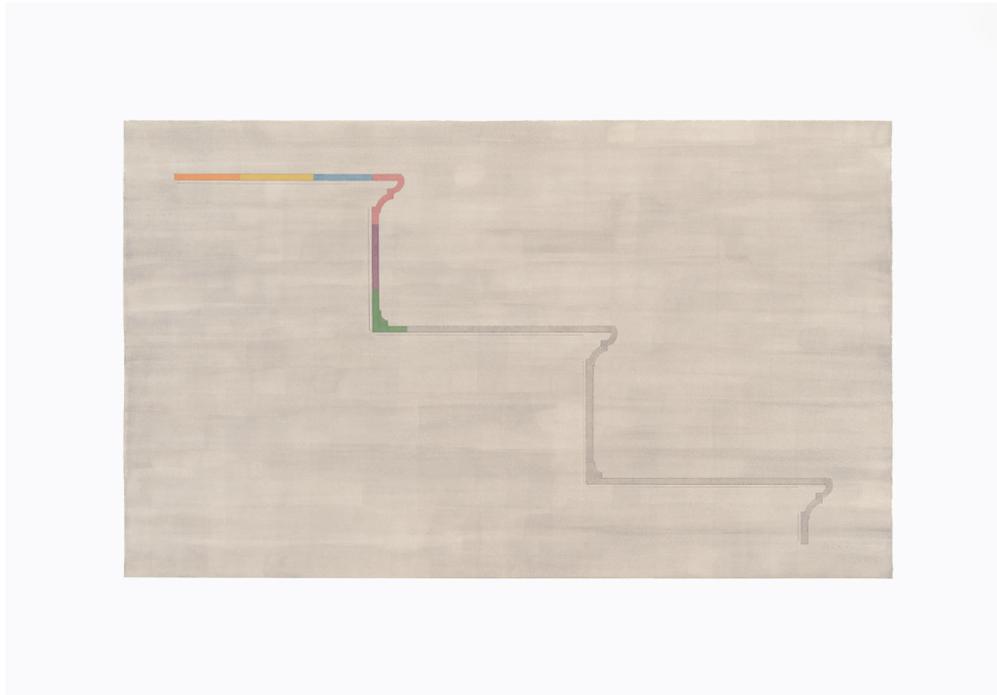
By Marjorie Welsh



Installation view: *Julia Fish: Transcriptions, Apparitions*, David Nolan Gallery, New York, 2026. Courtesy David Nolan Gallery.

A far cry from pop culture's counterfeit stylizations is the vernacular and its craft ethos. Artisans make a thing work through attention and care for material practices believed to be integral to the object in such a way that unique manufacture seems original even when not. Julia Fish belongs to the artisanal ways of doing art. Copying commonplace patterns is not taken for granted.

With Fish, the commonplace in question is the site of her Chicago home, from which to extract its patterns, of floors and their existing artisanship. Well respected for these simulacra, Julia Fish surprises us now especially in doubling: for her show *Transcriptions, Apparitions*, home and gallery sites are taken together. The twentieth-century New York townhouse, with its custom carpentry fittings and functions on the stairwell landing, introduces the exhibition. Here are drawings issuing from structural not decorative matter, with a touch giving painterly intervention to an element of architecture: stairs. From her home, for instance, is *East Stairway, Profile in line #3* (2006). From the gallery, seen from the riser's profile in *24 East 81st Street, Stair Profile in line with Hermitage spectrum on grey, west to east if west is green. After Buchman & Fox (1902)* (2025) her drawn line makes its expressive presence palpable: through a personally-inflected color spectrum, through facture, through a judicious excess of what is strictly speaking expedient.



Julia Fish, *24 East 81st Street, Stair Profile in line with Hermitage spectrum on grey, west to east if west is green. After Buchman & Fox (1902)*, 2025.  
Gouache on paper with transfer chalk and graphite, 21 ¾ × 36 ½ inches. Courtesy the artist and David Nolan Gallery.

As for the parquet flooring, these too couple home and gallery and are most conspicuously expressive and decidedly complex. For instance, *Threshold, Trace 3 – after Apparition, Hermitage spectrum - red, SouthWest – one* (2025) parquet flooring in the gallery is a pretext for floating memory of her Chicago home. Parquet of the gallery floor is the provocation yet this drawn flooring receives digitally-inserted color from a spectrum not intrinsic to natural wood and amounts to a near scribble when seen at a distance: this comes via productive discrepancies in the pattern from one drawing to the next that would indicate sources from both locations: the color from the Chicago home making its presence known in the New York parquet. Approximate alignments are welcome. Not owing to the virtuosity, which is evident, these painterly drawings are also quite other than commonplace skill in executing a subject whose requisite delicate tastefulness renders art palatable as décor. This series by Fish is significantly different from taste as an end in itself because it copies the collaged discrepancies of the assembled image through varied perspectival displacements of site, here rendered in dashed lines and blots over a faint score. Even so, the marking-making never loses elasticity, never falters within a firmly suspended stratification of decisions, in which layering manifests an excitement palpable enough to engage the dominant drawn edge of flooring. Fish as master draftsman is in full display here.

For context, the gallery has given an overview of earlier works, such as *Study - Fragments from Entry and Floret* (1999) simulating hexagonal floor-tiling that is calculated and reserved. The decidedly flat treatment in these give evidence of painting-as-surface and along the way refers to an orthodox modernism. Secreted in a niche is the key to the current exhibition, however. *Apparition : six Hermitage Thresholds @ 24 East 81st Street* (2024–25), a print-work done for the current exhibition is curatorially mindful in giving the viewer a perspectival vantage from above the gallery floor, with its own parquet, prompting Fish's current preoccupations. It discloses what is characteristic of her practice: that Fish's art is as hermetic as it is factually straightforward. A cultural framing as well, this illusionistic overview of the gallery floor distances us from the detail of the show—lending contextual explanation as a site map gives a traveler—to let us connect parts within a whole as viewed from a significant distance.