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## The Moment

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### Studio Visit | Gideon Rubin

By [KRISTOPHER HOUSER](#)

On a dreadful rainy day in London, I recently trekked up to Kilburn, an area marked by graffiti and dotted with street vendors selling discounted fruit and the odd plastic toy, to visit the studio of the painter Gideon Rubin.

I rang the bell to what looked like a government mega-complex, and the gates opened to reveal a dark parking area. I had to jump a few massive puddles to reach the artist's sprawling ground-floor work space.

Despite the gloomy environs outside, Rubin was all smiles. His studio was equally inviting — Martin Margiela-style white painted walls and floors, the occasional scattered rag doll and a jumble of photos taped to the walls.

The visual soup led me to ask the artist about his inspiration. "My references and models have changed over time; I used to work with still and live objects," said the 36-year-old Rubin, in his slightly accented English that betrays his Israeli roots. "But for my upcoming shows I have been using vintage photo albums."

Rubin sources these albums from all over the world and on eBay and then creates sweet looking portraits that evoke children's book illustrations, though Rubin's individuals have no faces. "I paint from objects that have life and layers — things that tell a story," he said, adding that he finds it difficult to paint new objects straight from the package or — harder still — family portraits.

Perhaps with good reason. Rubin is the grandson of the noted Romanian-born Israeli painter Reuven Rubin and the son of a diplomat and curator. He's reluctant to divulge too many details about his lineage but did note that a recent exhibition, "Family Traces," which opened at the Israel Museum in July, was the first time Rubin's art has been showed alongside his grandfather's.

Next month he has a solo show, "Mexican Summer," at the [Hosfelt Gallery](#) in San Francisco (Sept. 8 through Oct. 17), which features works he created from photos of a European family living in a Mexican village around 1920.

"I was drawn to the family in a photo album, because they felt out of place," he said. "I liked the relationship between the family and the locals. I was inspired by what they were wearing, what they were doing and how the two cultures interacted with each other. But mainly, I was inspired to paint the two kids, a brother and sister."

Rubin then walked me through his "1929" show for the [Rokeby Gallery in London](#)

(Oct. 8 to Nov. 12). Nearly 40 of the expected 60 to 70 paintings were in a working installation for my preview. The most obvious point of departure in "1929" is his newfound depiction of scenarios with more family groupings. (His previous works often have a singular child, faceless, in a non-identifiable situation.) Although stylistically consistent with Rubin's previous work, the "1929" series has a more colorful and unquestionably happy feeling to it.

Why the change in mood, I wondered? What's changed in his life? "I now have a 1-year-old daughter," he said smiling. At this rate, Rubin may yet turn his hand to painting family portraits.

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