

On the Bright Side

This Legally Blind Artist Is Painting His Way Through the Pages of *AD*

An L.A. show of artist Michael LeVell's work has been extended indefinitely

By Allie Weiss
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A painting by Michael LeVell, a visually impaired artist who paints interiors scenes inspired by *Architectural Digest*. Photo: Michael LeVell/Tierra del Sol

AD PRO's new [On the Bright Side](#) column covers a piece of good news coming out of the design world right now. Read on for a pick-me-up!

As the [coronavirus](#) caused countless businesses to shut their doors, spring gallery shows were collectively called off. At L.A.'s Tierra del Sol gallery, an exhibition of work by the artist Michael LeVell was canceled, but gallery director Paige Wery wanted to make sure the show—which had already been installed—was accessible to as many people as possible. After promoting LeVell's work on [social media](#) and through a [video exhibition walkthrough](#), Wery recently decided to extend the exhibition indefinitely, so that more people can lay eyes on his creations—albeit virtually. Apart from being a necessary business move—now is not the best time to install a new show—this wider promotion seems very much in line with the resilient spirit of the artist himself, who is both deaf and legally blind.

The works—which include acrylic paintings, colored pencil drawings, and ceramics—are a beautiful testament to LeVell's creativity and perseverance. LeVell's subject matter is also of particular comfort: The artist uses issues of *Architectural Digest* as a guide for the colorful rooms he depicts. "He begins his work by holding a magazine close to his eyes to observe the imagery," Wery says. "From there, he works close to the easel, methodically sketching from his memory the housescapes and interior designs that stimulate his aesthetic impulses. He studies his [color palette](#) with the same intensity and paints the entire surface of the paper in acrylic hues resonant of *Architectural Digest's* scenes and advertisements."



“He renders the entire scene with just a few colors and highly developed line work that creates furniture, grass, and landscape, as well as structure and depth,” gallery director Paige Wery says of this untitled piece. “I love that beautiful splash of yellow flowers as a focal point.” Photo: Michael LeVell/Tierra del Sol

LeVell’s attraction to the world of furniture, interiors, and *AD* runs in the family, as it turns out. “LeVell’s mother was an abstract painter who, according to LeVell’s sister Kim, liked the [antique furniture](#) featured in *Architectural Digest*, which she began subscribing to in the early 1970s,” Wery says. “Now, Kim seeks out vintage [copies] for her brother’s collection, and booksellers and antique shops in their community reserve the magazines for Kim and Michael.” The two also visit antique furniture stores, where LeVell uses his sense of touch to study the forms of the pieces in order to re-create them in his works.

The overall effect of the saturated compositions is both to calm and transport. The compositions are equal parts familiar and slightly foreign—it’s easy to imagine a family’s life unfolding just out of view. One can’t help but wonder the backstory behind each image—and which copy of *Architectural Digest* LeVell pulled it from. (Rest assured, however, that no actual pulling took place: “He never tears pages from the magazine,” Wery insists.) For those eager to connect the works to their inspiration, a browse through the [AD archive](#) may just be in order.



Another Michael LeVell painting that is currently installed at Tierra del Sol in L.A. The gallery is open to locals by appointment only. Photo: Michael LeVell/Tierra del Sol

<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/blind-artist-painting-his-way-through-architectural-digest>