

In the summer of 2024, I had one of those embarrassingly heightened and hard-to-describe encounters at that big Eva Hesse exhibition. All the latex had aged like skin - the crackled and crisped kind. Only the skill of conservators prevented the art from disintegrating and falling apart. The works are treated like relics, and relics beget pilgrims. I was simultaneously pilgrim and heretic. Pilgrim since I had made the journey physically and emotionally but heretic because I had wondered how I could make this into a painting.

Hesse's exhibition made me sense the skin of my own paintings. I initially learned the process for rabbit-skin-glue gesso from Cennino Cennini's 14th-century manual. He described a method for keeping air bubbles out. Today, many artists add a splash of denatured alcohol to rid their panels of such imperfections. The thing is - it's not structurally necessary to do it that way. I know this because of a longtime commitment of looking at art. I've seen plenty of centuries-old examples that remain bright despite being pockmarked.

Choosing to forgo the pursuit of perfection, I whipped the shit out of the gesso to create a porous surface, similar to skin and bone.

Continuing my heretical impulse for the five smaller panels, I staged a "post-medium"-inspired script. (Think Sol Lewitt.) This is not merely a semantic exercise. After the gessoing, lay down a wash following a Renaissance landscape color regime. The brown and some of the red pigments are from crushed rocks and dirt from Olmsted parks in our city. Next step, go to the parks and draw from life with ink and silverpoint. Final step, back indoors, react with a frottage-like sensibility to the marks previously laid down. (Think Max Ernst.)

All of these are chronologically layered conceptual tropes, and address the particularly nuanced relationship of authorship, of subjects and objects to painting (and drawing).

For the larger panel I didn't follow the script. It didn't suit the peculiar but familiar situation: that of concourses in museums. Rather than reacting to the shuttling of such a passage way - I chose to repeatedly sit with it for two years. It was surprisingly disorienting. While all the art in this series

confuses many things (including the division of painting and drawing), this particular panel, insists on a back-and-forth dynamic with a medieval hallway at The Met. After every visit, I brought home little bits of the museum both pictorial and physical. I crushed the physical parts and turned it into pigment. I'd never know beforehand which I would walk away with.

This passageway displays a panoply of art. It contains relics which continue the displaced relic logic, but without the worship of god.

On my larger panel I began with only a perspective line, but my chosen approach perverted it rather than making it a rule. It was about itself as perspective, within itself, and more of an icon than an observation. Where the single-point convergence occurs, you find an echo of The Last Supper reflected on a vitrine.

Throughout the exhibition many of the doctrines of art are poked at in a droll manner. Approximating a far broader sense of scale.

Living in New York City I more often than not find myself in fabricated places. (Which poetically mirrors this exhibition). Olmsted-designed environment and Robert Moses' plans are especially evocative. The troubles of Olmsted and Moses differ, but are un-ignorable: Olmsted's democratic fantasy is informed by the Sublime and the Picturesque - underlying naturalisms fictions; Moses' modern, technocratic metropolis brings to mind Plato and his goons plotting their republic (with their inhumane solutions). I am approaching contradictions as a thing itself and I am not smoothing it out. Plato's provocations offer a set of questions about justice, society, the good, etc., which are perennially asked and answered with messy solutions. As such, maintenance perpetuates an ideal.

Reading David Joselit's *After Art* sharpened thoughts I was having while painting landscapes. Joselit's title acts like a Swiss Army knife - at one and the same time a chronological period (i.e., what comes after the era of contemporary art), an aesthetic strategy used as attribution qualifier (i.e., "after Sherrie Levine"), or simply being in the manner of art.

Joselit's argument also involves a view of art and infrastructure, in which museums shuttle us through a built environment - one that acts like a bank displaying currencies and debts. This engages somewhat humorously with the way the work is here displayed.

- C'naan Hamburger, May 2026