

# ARTFORUM



View of “Joseph Holtzman,” 2020. From left: *Artist Hibernating*, 2019; *Athena by the Sea*, *a Nocturne*, 2020.

including an aristocratic pot leaf-patterned wallpaper (“marijuana chintz,” as the artist calls it); a glamorously funereal plinth that once belonged to Robert Mapplethorpe; an Aesthetic Movement armoire Holtzman purchased “from some ex-rock-and-roll person”; a ca. 1918 Davenport sofa; linoleum rugs from the 1920s printed with illustrated nursery rhymes in milky pastels; walls felted in royal blue, yellow, and sundry shades of viridian; and still more felt panels in Pauline Trigère red set inside a luminescent silver-leafed grid, immaculately installed across the ceiling. The overall effect was of an über-upholstered jewel box, angel-dusted by Zandra Rhodes and Elsie de Wolfe—a dizzying, decadent backdrop for the artist’s six serious-minded pictures.

Joseph Holtzman

Parker Gallery

The sumptuous Park Avenue duplex of *coller des bijoux* czar Kenneth Jay Lane; Dawnridge, the byzantine Beverly Hills stronghold built by designer and artist Tony Duquette and his wife, Elizabeth Johnstone; Neuschwanstein Castle, King Ludwig II of Bavaria’s fairy-tale palace: These haute abodes are examples of the most exquisite and extreme queer taste. Profane notions regarding old-school faggery, including theatricality, opulence, and camp are in fact among the most sacred, vaporizing all pretenses to normativity in favor of perversity, ostentation, and rabid originality. Joseph Holtzman—founder of the iconic and lavishly produced magazine for unorthodox home interiors, *Nest*, published between 1997 and 2004—is a direct descendant of those fulsome fuck-you style kaisers, a paradigm of modern-day, out-of-this-world maximalism. So it was a bit of a surprise when this invert encountered the artist’s sextet of remarkably sober paintings in a terrifically decked-out apartment on Manhattan’s Upper East Side—*Nest*’s former base of operations.

The exhibition, presented by Los Angeles-based Parker Gallery, was quintessential *Nest*-era Holtzman, chock-full of *recherché* appointments and luxe adornments,

Alex Jovanovich, “Reviews: Joseph Holtzman at Parker Gallery.” *Artforum* (March 2021), accessed online.

Holtzman's paintings are heavy, figuratively *and* literally, done in oil on amply sized slabs of marble and framed by thick planks of chestnut, sourced from old barns, which make it easier for him to move the works around in his studio. His palette is melancholy, full of dank purples, indigos, and bottle greens. Crimson and oranges show up as well, but they, too, are dark, moody—as though dredged through soil and ash. All of the pieces here were inspired by a trip Holtzman took to the Greek island of Hydra in 2019, a place Henry Miller once referred to as “perfect, the very epitome of that flawless anarchy which supersedes, because it includes and goes beyond all the formal arrangements of the imagination.” That “flawless anarchy” unfolds throughout the artist's abstract landscapes, such as the vertically oriented *Athena by the Sea, a Nocturne*, 2020, in which a glowing celestial body (the goddess of warfare herself?) hovers over four Klee-ish bands rendered in a flurry of swirling brushstrokes that may represent the classical elements—water, earth, air, and fire. *Artist Hibernating*, 2019, is a seemingly cosmic tableau that features a pale, sperm-like figure racing across a roiling expanse of heaven full of bright golden stars and alien serpentine forms. *Untitled*, 2019, perhaps the most menacing picture in the show, ostensibly depicts a sad swamp creature rising out of a great pool of cerulean and violet muck. It was the only work in this presentation in which the pictorial field metastasized over and into the wooden frame surrounding it.

Holtzman's tastes in decor tend toward the fabulously unfashionable, and one can say the same of his painting. All of his images feel as though they've been touched by those outliers of modernism—the occultists, the mystics, the fanatics—who cycle in and out of vogue: Morris Graves, Alfred Jensen, Wolfgang Paalen, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Mark Tobey, to name just a handful. It makes sense that Holtzman absorbed the sun-kissed environs of Hydra and transformed them into the most caliginous sections of Hades—after all, he helped rough up the polite world of interior design, allowing it to become weirder, sexier, gnarlier. But I'm glad he's now exploring the interiors of his own marvelous psyche and once again introducing us to spaces that are truly extraordinary.

Alex Jovanovich, “Reviews: Joseph Holtzman at Parker Gallery.” *Artforum* (March 2021), accessed online.