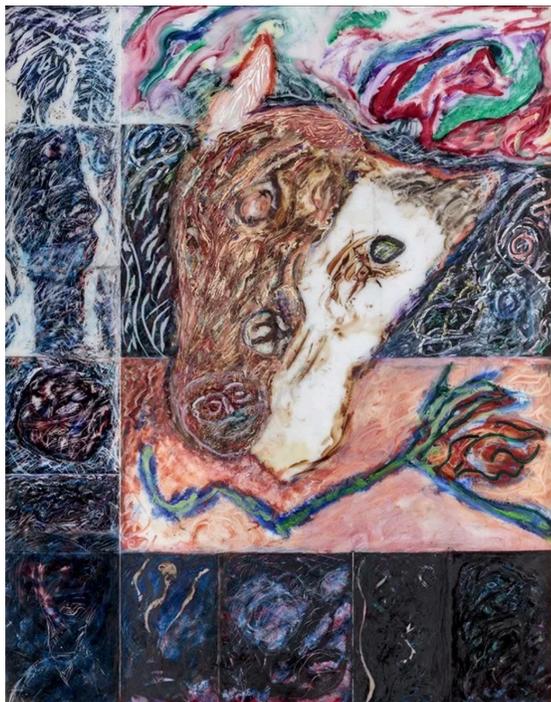


Joseph Holtzman: *Six Recent Paintings* at Bel Ami



Joseph Holtzman, *Jay Fisher, Museum Curator, Baltimore* (2017). Oil on marble in artist's frame, framed: 55 1/4 x 37 3/8 inches, unframed: 40 x 31 1/2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Bel Ami.

Joseph Holtzman's frenzied *Self-portrait* (2011) is a kaleidoscopic, splintered picture plane that tests the standards of portraiture. If T. S. Eliot claimed one might "Put on a face to meet the faces that you meet," Holtzman clearly has a closet packed full of intricate, abstract disguises. The individual Holtzman portrays appears in schizophrenic, comic-book grid sequence: a squiggle here, a shattered form resembling a face there. Upon closer inspection these outlines assume the quality of cells beneath a microscope. The self, after all, comprises countless enigmatic facets that Holtzman is eager to unmask.

The artist has an eye for the decorative, as founder of the now-defunct design magazine *Nest: A Quarterly of Interiors* (1997–2004). Each painting in Holtzman's exhibition is meticulously rendered on marble and encased in a wooden frame that slinks off the painting's edge, recalling both a rustic ladder and an early-Renaissance altar panel. These frames exude a handmade quality that complements the artist's peculiar union of dark, surrealist wit and fauvist palette with the shaky hand of an art brutist.

Unexpected perspectives appear throughout his paintings, best exemplified by *Jay Fisher, Museum Curator* (2017). While Fisher is a real curator of prints at the Baltimore Museum of Art, and perhaps a colleague or acquaintance to the artist, here Holtzman joyously depicts the vibrant, expressive face of a dog amid a backdrop of swirling scribbles. From these scrawled lines, one makes out the small form of a human face on the animal's jaw. The glaring tension between the painting's title and what is depicted points to the artist's conception of portrait as grander than physical likeness, encapsulating the sitter's spirit in addition to their complexion. With this expansive notion of selfhood in mind, Holtzman begs the age-old question: who are we, anyways?

Simone Krug, "Joseph Holtzman: Six Recent Paintings at Bel Ami." *Carla* (March 1, 2018), accessed online.