

Wallpaper*

An artist returns: Joseph Holtzman's works on show at LA's Hammer



The founder, creative director and publisher of *Nest* magazine, Joseph Holtzman reveals his paintings at Los Angeles' Hammer Museum in a show called 'Hammer projects: Joseph Holtzman'. *Photography: Brian Forrest*

The Edward Larrabee Barnes-designed home of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles is architecturally remarkable only in its anonymity: perched on a sloping corner site, its blank facade stands in the shadow of a bland office building and turns in on itself so as to practically disappear. And so, to find a room awash in vibrant hues – arched walls panelled in felt, floor lined in a jazzy Jugendstil carpet – comes as a shock. Fortunately, there are cushy furnishings on which to recover, including a sofa and two armchairs with red piping so thick it resembles cake frosting. This is the richly textured world of Joseph Holtzman.

'Joe was intent on creating a comfortable space where one can really spend time looking,' says Hammer senior curator Anne Ellegood of the gallery-turned-'quasi-domestic space', in which an exhibition of Holtzman's work is on view until 20 September. 'I thought the overall experience might be somewhat overwhelming. But I was surprised by how elegant the installation is. His use of colour is really beautiful and his attention to materiality is exquisite. He's an aesthete, but a highly original and surprising one, and that comes through loud and clear.'

Stephanie Murg, "An artist returns: Joseph Holtzman's works on show at LA's Hammer Museum." *Wallpaper* (July 29, 2015), accessed online.

Founder, creative director and publisher of the wonderfully off-kilter shelter magazine *Nest*, New York-based Holtzman shuttered the quarterly in 2004 to return to painting after a hiatus of almost 25 years. 'I felt restricted by the palette, particularly, of graphic design,' he says of the decision. 'There's a difference between painting and graphic design, and I think that painters today are at a place similar to where the Impressionist painters were at the time of the invention of photography.'

An interior decorator and inveterate collector (the newly slipcovered comfy chairs and rug come from his own home), he confronts the present tyranny of the backlit image by delighting in surfaces, from the setting in which he immerses them, to the viewer, to the paintings themselves. The show's six large, colourful and strikingly framed works, which flicker between abstraction and figuration, are painted on marble or slate rather than canvas. 'I was looking for a hard, bright surface – something that would refract light,' explains Holtzman. 'At first I was gessoing [priming] the slate, to get a white ground, and I thought well, what about marble?' He found his answer at the 100-year-old quarry in Danby, Vermont where he selects his white stone.

In the softly lit, windowless space (originally designed to house a rare manuscript by Leonardo da Vinci), the paintings shimmer and glow without being slick. The compositions, achieved with thin layers of paint that are etched to reveal traces of the rocky slabs beneath, simultaneously fuse with their luminous substrates and float above them, evoking crayoned wax resists. In the age of Instagram, their charms deliberately evade the camera. 'I really don't think the paintings convey in a graphic image – an image on the screen,' says Holtzman. 'But if they could be seen in a photographic way, then I wouldn't bother to do them.'



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