

Standards: Ian Swanson at Matéria Core City

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Ashley Cook

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Currently on view at Matéria Core City are twelve paintings that illustrate the artist Ian Swanson's newfound employment of texture after nearly a decade of increasingly subtractive approaches to material application. As mentioned in the exhibition text, *Standards* is a return to the painterly techniques of the artist's early years, functioning as a synthesis of everything between then and now. The flat vinyl surfaces host interdependent paths of home-made acrylic paint' like the color blocking of a Fauvist. They travel in the directions needed to sculpt the two-dimensional forms, providing vague definition to loosely guide perception.



Whispering Oasis

Swanson's relationship to the figure and the ground continues to manifest in abstractions that imply rumination on the concept of embodiment as a confined physical experience. Drawing from a reverence for medieval tapestries, and the work of artists like Milton Avery and Leon Golub², Swanson's subjects are intimately woven into their environments. Through a careful use of form and tone, his compositions provide glimpses into his own metaphysical dreamscapes of wandering silhouettes that are momentarily suspended as if pausing to peer outside of their frames.



Humble Visitor

The gentle rendering of the paintings contributes to a compelling conversation when paired with the overt physicality of their object-hood. The PVC and hardware breaks the illusion that traditional art materials facilitate. Translating the language of material falls more so in line with the history of sculpture, but Swanson has been treading the line between 2D and 3D since he started making art. Ian Swanson's early work explored abstraction through impasto on canvas, modernist-esque found-object sculpture, and occasionally, ritualistic performance. Each new exhibition has provided



Left: *The Nocturnal Teacher*, Right: *Cavern of the Avatar*

the opportunity to scrutinize and refine his process, and with that, the mark making slowly became more minimal, and figurative sculpture even began to appear. He has always worked with a disinterest in usual methods of art production, and instead, regularly presents new solutions to image and object making.

In a fine art context, anything that strays from tradition becomes a concept to unpack. For Swanson, personal history has always played an important role in his thinking and deci-

sion making. He was raised by working-class Jehovah's Witness parents, but experienced the effects of "othering" when his family left the denomination. The extrication from this religious community prompted Swanson to immerse himself in Detroit's rich underground scene of the early 2000's. He actively participated as an artist and organizer for grassroots initiatives like ORG Contemporary (an art gallery at the Russell Industrial Center that he ran in collaboration with Chris Samuels). Swanson was also a member of North End Studios in the project's early years. For those who did not know De-



Lament of the Anointed



Phantom Eclipse

troit at that time, it was a lawless landscape of creative experimentation. Artists were free, and encouraged, to explore new ways to use material and space, shaping Swanson's subsequent work as an artist and organizer in New York. In addition to studying the history of art and music, Swanson has remained acutely influenced by his two grandfathers, one who carved Swedish trolls in a traditional folk art way, and the other, who owned a traditional sign painting company on the East Side of Detroit.³

Perhaps the magic that is fostered from such a diverse array of insights is a balance of hierarchy between the extraordinary and the mundane. Whether it be two or three dimensional, each artwork he creates is a channel to filter Swanson's anomalous introspection into the limitless influences of life.

Standards by Ian Swanson opened on June 22 at Matéria Core City, and will be on view until August 10, 2024.

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1. Ian Swanson in conversation with Ashley Cook, June 2024.
2. Ian Swanson, June 2024
3. Ian Swanson, June 2024

*All images courtesy of Matéria Gallery.