

Matthew Sepielli's Heavy and Not-heavy Paintings By Julian Kreimer

Matthew Sepielli informs me that every desert island in the world has plastic bottles that have washed up on the shore, so if you find yourself washed up on a desert island, at least you'll have a bottle to fill. The woods behind the suburb where he grew up—the woods behind all suburbs—were and are full of accumulated debris, the leaves growing out of cans, phone books, and sneakers.

Rug fragments, books, boards, and tin scraps serve as partial or full supports for Sepielli's paintings. Paint-can lids punctuate the surface of *Black-Blue-Brown-Bark-Brick*. Parked against a window, the painting lets light flood in through diamond-shaped holes cut into the colored disks. As in many of his works, the material reality of the painting dominates the image. These are, in terms of pounds and ounces, heavy paintings. Not so in terms of bathos. Funny color schemes, compositions that spell out acronyms for things like *Physical Education* and *Pink Force Field*, and a general sense of 'what if I try this?' run throughout.

The surfaces are crusty. Shiny, slimy-looking layers of glue and varnish seem to bubble out from below. They elicit a powerful urge to touch: to run fingers over the holes, like inverted Braille, drilled into the books; over the strands and objects frozen in the paint. Like the paintings of Albert Pinkham Ryder, there's a strong chance the materials will continue to interact and change for a long time after the last brushstroke is laid down. Which makes sense for paintings made on fragments of Tibetan carpets woven from the hair of those goats that could withstand the highest peaks. The assumption for ex-carpet-salesman Sepielli is the same as it is for the goatherds—change is the only constant. And as any of his paintings may have started life as a palette for another painting, so too could the backwards B in *Black Book* be two of those Himalayan peaks turned on their side, or a window to an earlier incarnation of the painting, or the abbreviated name of selfsame work. And if the dots and lines in *Stick Stacks* are as reminiscent of the twinkling lights of the oil refineries seen from the low-teen exits of the NJ Turnpike as they are of woven nomadic designs, well that's probably fine too.

Julian Kreimer is a painter and assistant professor of Painting at SUNY Purchase College. He has written for *Modern Painters* and *Art in America*, for which he is currently a regularish contributor.

Written for Matthew Sepielli's solo exhibition at *Tiger Strikes Asteroid* in Philadelphia in 2010.