

KEVIN FRANK

The Joy of Seeing

At first glance, Kevin Frank's latest work might seem like a series of anomalies. Represented are beam-obstructed views of a subway platform, a lone figure in an interior of shadowy grays, highly chromatic still lifes and a piece from his *Camp* series, a body of work he is revisiting in which he depicts kitschy figurines.

But there is actually a strong line of continuity that runs through all of the work, no matter the subject.

"It may look like I'm all over the place, but I'm not," says Frank. "I jump around but the agenda is pretty much the same. I may be drawn to the subterranean, artificial lighting in the subway and the way the light is hitting those highly chromatic

riveted beams. I'm fascinated by patterns. There's one after another if you look for them. For me, it's about liking the way the light is hitting a variety of materials, color temperature and harmonies, shapes and forms," he continues. "I'm like a little kid drawn to colorful shiny objects but I'll do something entirely monochromatic if I like the form. Each painting is a technical challenge—whether it's color-related or a compositional idea I have...if I can pull it off, it's a new skill I've learned that I can take with me to my next painting."

Not only is Frank's eye captured by a variety of subjects that he renders with equal skill, the artist also moves between the ancient wax-based medium

of encaustic, and oils, a choice typically determined by the scene itself.

Frank's recent *Camp* pieces are in oil and, while he insists that his work is grounded in a love of process and observation, there are deeper layers to the series, the name for which references a 1964 essay by Susan Sontag. *Saying Grace* is a painting of a porcelain collectible sculpture of the Norman Rockwell painting. He has similar tongue-in-cheek works featuring Hummel figurines.

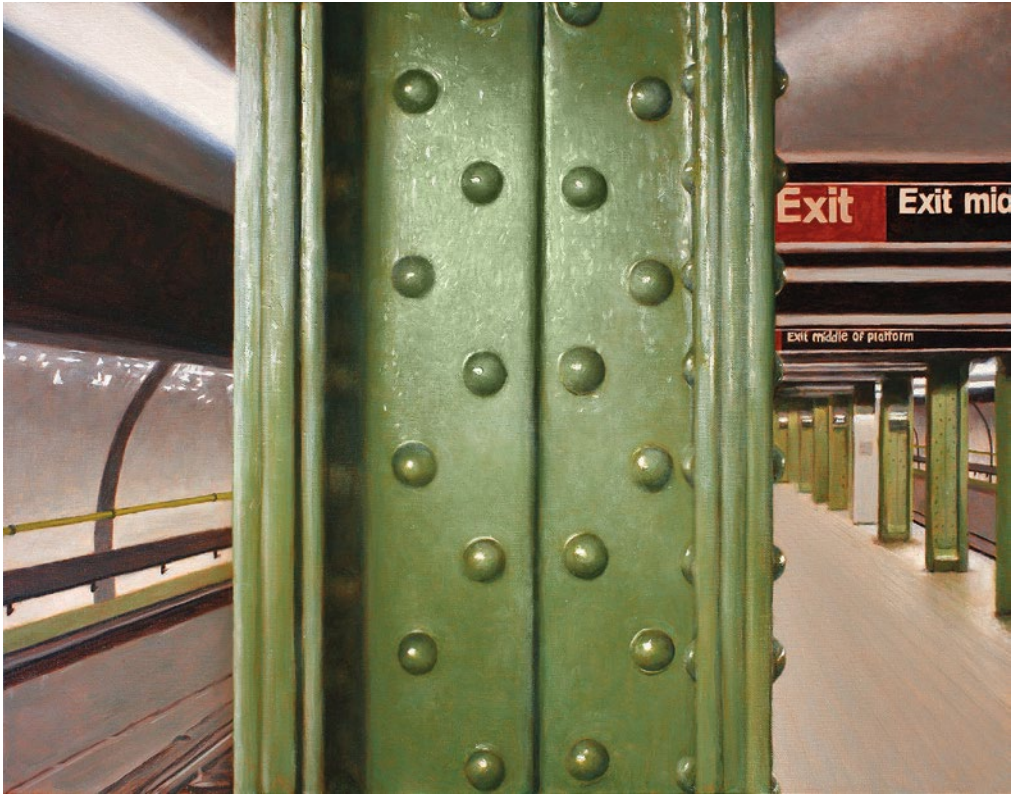
"Giving them a dramatic baroque treatment using Old Master techniques is a way to elevate the schlocky things that were ubiquitous in my youth...and with the Rockwell pieces, it's interesting to take a



1
Vertebrata, encaustic
on wood panel,
16 x 20"

2
Patterns 3, oil on
canvas, 22 x 28"

3
*Between the Column
and the Stairwell*,
encaustic on wood
panel, 22 x 30"



2

figurine based on a painting and turn it back into a painting.”

Between the Column and the Stairwell, Vertebrata and Still Life with Orange Kettle (Life and Death) are all in encaustic, an arduous process he says is akin to “painting with a sledgehammer,” requiring heated spatulas and other ancient burnishing tools to blend the transitions. “In each painting I try to hide the labor and make it look spontaneous, but it’s anything but,” says Frank.

In *Still Life with Orange Kettle (Life and Death)*, Frank’s incorporation of decorative drapery adds extra pop to the lively composition. But, to keep it from being too cheerful, Frank included a little bundle of sticks at the base.

“The sticks are a counterbalance to all the life in this painting,” says Frank.



3



4
Still Life with Orange
Kettle (Life and Death),
encaustic on wood
panel, 22 x 18"

5
Patterns 2, oil on
canvas, 22 x 28"

6
Saying Grace, oil on
canvas, 37 x 35"



5



6

"They're dead. Their best days are over. It's a little reminder at the bottom to have fun today because you're going to be dead as a doornail tomorrow. I also just wanted to paint sticks."

Between the Column and the Stairwell is based on an amalgam of photos shot two decades ago at the Guggenheim. The museum was a playground for him and his wife—the central figure in the piece—for many years. The title alludes to Edvard Munch's self-portrait *Between the Clock and the Bed* and Jasper Johns' 1981 abstract encaustic of the same name that references the cross-hatching in the bedspread in the Munch painting.

"Everywhere you look in the Guggenheim is a fascinating view," says Frank, who highlights the geometric architectural shapes and forms through light and shadow. "You've got these borders framing your life—what's on the side, what's in the middle. By bringing attention to the frame, it will draw your eye right to what's in between. My whole life—my wife, art—is between those frames." ●

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