

ERIC HESSE

Impersonal Spaces



- 1
I Know Your Sweet Greys, encaustic on panel, 40 x 49"
- 2
La Vague, Distance, encaustic on panel, 48 x 72"
- 3
About the Crossing, encaustic on panel, 30 x 40"
- 4
The Only Dark is Darkest, encaustic on panel, 40 x 48"
- 5
The Shade, Mostly, encaustic on panel, 30 x 40"

Years ago, painter Eric Hesse would commute to work within Los Angeles. His home and studio were 5 miles apart, but it would take 30 minutes or more in LA traffic to get to either place. Certainly other commuters had longer drives, but Hesse was confounded by the small distance he had to go and the time it was taking him to get there. "My way of coping was to stare at the underpasses as I went through them," he says. "It was me interacting in a very personal way to a very impersonal city."

Hesse, who has since moved within Los Angeles and now has a studio across the street from his home, has turned the impersonal spaces within one of the largest cities in the world into his next batch of work in *Almost Not There*, a new show now up at George Billis Gallery in Los Angeles.

"Bound more by theme than motif, the work in this exhibit skitters on the line





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between presence and absence. Walls, water, brick and metal, atmosphere and mountain, each is set up to pique with strangeness and inevitability,” he says. “Exploring the magic of contradictions, the subjects are simultaneously tenuous and formidable, inviting and frank, and a wry retort to a question. ‘Are we almost there?’ No, we are almost not there.”

Hesse’s love-hate relationship with Los Angeles is the focal point in the exhibition. “You live here long enough and it feels like living through a long blank stare,” he says. “The only way I can fight it is to stare back, which turns it into a staring contest. I never win, but I get some good images out of it.”

Images include scenes of walls that are seamlessly joined to the sky, billboards that shine into the city’s darkness, and *I Know Your Sweet Greys*, of a window and an endless scene beyond. “I love the intimacy of something right in front of you that you can’t quite get around. The window is impassable, but then there’s also something so far away that you can’t quite focus on it, like heaven or Avalon or a distant shore,” Hesse says. “The temptation is to want to go out there, but I want to create enough interest in the foreground that you might want to linger, in an almost benevolent prison.”

Tressa Williams, the gallery’s director, says Hesse’s work has found a great home at the Los Angeles gallery. “Using buildings, backlit billboards and power lines to create color fields and geometric compositions, Hesse finds the beauty in the back alleys and byways of Los Angeles. Hesse works in encaustic—a complex and ancient medium not often seen today. Using custom-designed tools to manipulate the heated wax and pigment, Hesse creates delicately textured compositions in both muted colors and rich jewel tones. Hesse’s command of the medium shows clearly in these paintings: roof tiles, power lines, and bricks appear in great detail, but he is also capable of a softness, a delicacy, in the skies and far horizons of these moody atmospheric images,” Williams says. “Merging a traditional medium with his highly contemporary subject matter, Hesse speaks to the juxtapositions we are surrounded by in our everyday lives. The push and pull between the old and the new, between nature and city, between our inner and outer selves.” ●

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