

**After Image**  
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Among metaphors that structure thought in western culture, the equating of *seeing* with *knowing* is primary: *Do you see what I'm saying? It's hard for me to see why you would think that. I feel like I'm in the dark. Take a hard look at how you feel. Is it becoming clearer? See for yourself.* But seeing is always shaped by expectations and recollections, what we desire to see and what we've seen before.



*when the after-image is the image*—an eleven by fourteen inch painting that shares its uncapitalized title with the exhibition of seventy works by Brendan Getz at Carrie Secrist Gallery—is not a painting of the sun. Rather, it's a painting of looking at the sun (a painting of a memory of looking at the sun) that's so rigorous in its verisimilitude that it's difficult to see. One feels the familiar seduction of the rising or setting sun infused with the panic of looking at something too bright for eyes. A sense of danger opens, the impulse to look away. In the alchemy of blended paint there's an emergent luminosity so bright that it sheds visibility. How is this achieved?



when the after-image is the image

Even upon close inspection it's hard to figure out. I perceive the subtle blue surrounded by a thin ring of white that represents the bright spot of the sun, but I don't trust it. It's not blue is it? It's bright white. It's

brighter than white. It's light. But no, it is very blue. And it's paint, not light. It's blue paint cloaked in past perceptions of brightness and associations of brightness with white—and it's this subliminal blue that triggers the impulse to look away. It's the exact blue of retinal shock that's present during encounters with intense luminosity; the color that lingers, shaped like the sun, in the wake of looking at it. This is the after-image alive in the image, both blue paint and recollected brightness, and it's hard to see.



It's also therefore hard to know. The uncomfortable vibrancy of the after-image reads as a kind of veiled presence, a stranger in the painting. And while it's tempting to reduce this presence to a residue of the impressive close-looking that Getz brings to his subjects, there's a remainder: an alien vitality within the insistently quotidian subjects of Getz' paintings that make them both sublime and disquieting.



residual fleck (ice tray)

The painting *residual fleck (ice tray)* confronts the viewer with a generic ice tray, upended and empty, standing on an indistinct countertop leaning against an indistinct wall. In each of its sixteen hollows a glint of refracted light hovers slightly off center like the highlights that radiate presence in the eyes of cartoons.

From within these glints the tray feels surprised as if we snuck up on it, caught it doing something shameful. It's there, hiding something behind its back, utterly present and aware of us and in the same moment receding into its unknowability: into the so focus and muted tones of the rendering and the perspectival instability of the tray's relationship to the surfaces that support it.



Encountering *residual fleck (ice tray)* feels like encountering an opossum in the dark, an effect that many of Getz' paintings achieve. As I approach *Containers*, I surprise a thin glass vessel sitting precariously near the edge of a surface, casting its shadow on the wall behind it. The flat light is coming from behind me as if I opened a pantry door onto this private scene and the shadow on the wall—the shadow vessel behind (within) the glass—is visible through the translucent container that's casting it. It's another species of image/a er-image superimposition that sparks a recognition of presence in the painting. In this instance, seeing the shadow of the glass within the glass evokes an intense recognition of vulnerability and identification with the subject. Its shadow becomes something profoundly private, a self-image that it's attempting and failing to conceal. In that failure there's a twang, a reverberation between the volume of

glass and its exposed and flattened shadow that's amplified by the spatial tension between the horizontal surface supporting it and the wall. The shadow of the vessel transitions seamlessly between the two planes implying a tight proximity but to the right another shadowy form is wedged in the gap at an angle that implies some distance between them. Getz insists on this instability, this open-endedness that grants resonance. Like the restrained flexing of color that seeps into view as you spend time with the work, the ambiguity of that gap is an animating breath that makes the painting read more like a portrait than a still life.



Containers

What makes this collection of work thrilling to encounter is that the subject of these portraits, the stranger in them, isn't contained by any single work nor by the exhibition as a whole. The porosity of the images, their so ness and instability—their furtiveness—allows for slippage between them, despite how diverse they are, and slippage between them and the world. As I try to unpack the excited discomfort I feel looking at a jury of six evenly hung images of the sun, I notice a reflection of ceiling light on the polished floor that

has almost the exact hue and scale of the rightmost sun. The tall floor to ceiling windows at my back that open the seventh-floor gallery to the city expose me to the warmth and light of the actual sun cast across the array of effigies.



On an adjacent wall, the only non-solar painting in the room—a lush portrait of a small magnetic dish for gathering sewing needles—radiates its magnetism, gathering light and pulling at the marble-sized suns in the room and the sky. Down the hall, *side mirror (wait)* collects a corresponding group of luminous orbs, the moon and some street lights, in the side mirror of a car. Next to that painting, the scale of three vertical linear reflections on a body of water in *gleam plane (east bay)*, collapses into the linear reflections on the rounded and implicitly smaller surfaces of a french press and an antique watering can in *gleam plane (coffee painting)* and *gleam plane, watering can*.





The space of representation is then more zealously punctured by the presentation on low plinths of objects from Getz' studio—mahl sticks, chairs and stools, the mat he stands on when he paints. The objects challenge me to see how egalitarian I can be with my attention while proposing a kind of ontological parity across broadly varied constellations of matter. Pockets of snow on a mountain in *summer snow (teton)* ally with stray flecks of white paint on an angular folding chair. Painted smoke stacks in *supports* reiterate vertically arranged, paint spattered mahl sticks. The paint on these objects, in its incidental accumulation, is free of its duty to represent the world which awakens the possibility of that liberation in the hung pictures. The objecthood of the paintings themselves becomes yet another after-image.





And this fluidity between the space I inhabit as a viewer and the space of representation encourages an extension of the attentiveness the paintings engender out beyond the frame of the gallery. In an inclusion that flexes the capaciousness of Getz' vision, *brim, ear, from my dad*, we see a portrait of the artist's father's right ear under the brim of his Stetson hat, the only direct, albeit partial, representation of a human figure in the show. Divorced from the rest of the head, the ear becomes another semi-living, autonomous object at home with the various containers, plates, plants, houses, mountains, planes, birds, smokestacks, bookends, suns and shadows. There's an exciting correlation between the reaching brim of the hat and the formally and chromatically congruous flower petals in the nearby painting *evening and outside (surface company and tones between)*. The petals illuminate the delicacy within the traditionally masculine parabola of the brim and harmonize in their shared capacity for cradling sunlight. But more importantly, framed with the ear, the curve of the brim becomes a key—a visualization of listening, of receptivity—that unlocks the attentiveness that this work performs and teaches. Suddenly all the open and empty containers—a jar, a plate, a void between bookends, a magnetic dish—are listening. The mahl sticks are listening. The empty chairs. The walls. The sun. I'm listening.

