

Glass Houses 24: Geoff Hippenstiel

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Geoff Hippenstiel is a Houston-based painter whose work was recently featured in a solo exhibition at Devin Borden Gallery, two years after receiving his MFA from the University of Houston. Influenced by painting giants Luc Tuymans, Robert Ryman, and Georg Baselitz, Hippenstiel spends his time layering paint onto canvas in a 1200-square-foot studio in downtown Houston, just across from the new soccer stadium.

The smell of oil paint and turpentine fill Hippenstiel's studio space, his newest series of paintings hang on the fifteen-foot walls. Immersive and consuming, they offer a glimpse of sublimity, the coveted and invisible quality that so many painters strive for but fail to reach. Philosopher Jacques Derrida described the sublime as akin to the "abyss," a state beyond aesthetic satisfaction and bordering on complete negation. Similarly, Hippenstiel's paintings are conceived through the negation of subject matter by abstraction.

"[The paintings create] another space, where you're looking up at these things and it's a sort of, a perfect space," Hippenstiel says about his works in progress. The paintings hanging in his studio



are abstractions of 17th century frescoes—gods and angels looking up toward the heavens. The centers of these works are thinly painted in lighter colors, implying the clear skies of the beyond. Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas comes to mind, as does the more culturally significant Sistine Chapel in Vatican City. Hippenstiel’s new paintings capture the moment of realization—a sky becomes a painted sky, a plane becomes a painted plane. Hippenstiel’s perspective overrides the original subject matter while retaining the feeling of peering into the beyond.

Geoff Hippenstiel does not want to be labeled. Influenced by the first German expressionists as well as contemporary painters, one of Hippenstiel’s favorite artists, Gerhard Richter said, “One has to believe in what one is doing, one has to commit oneself inwardly, in order to do painting.” Richter’s words apply to Hippenstiel’s artistic convictions. Hippenstiel says of his work: “You have to keep growing, you have to keep moving. Otherwise, what’s the point?”





Hippenstiel maintains what is important; he paints what makes one see, not what is visible. Standing in front of layers of encaustic, a vast array of color from gold to cosmic black and canvases ranging in scale from six feet to ten inches, Hippenstiel affirms: "I don't think labels fit but I'm pretty sure I can say I'm a painter, I'm pretty sure about that."

[Debra Barrera](#) is a Houston artist and writer.