

Joe Andoe

February 23 — March 18, 2023

A Joe Andoe painting sounds like a low vibrational hum, like static between radio stations, the soft drone of electromagnetic waves traveling through ink black space before snapping into focus. Andoe's pictures are him tuning into a station, which can be a moment in time, or a feeling. They can look like real places or recognizable things, Andoe's pictures, spectral stags and chickens, ghostly in their stark white whiteness; a pond in cinematic panorama (what Joe calls his Hillbilly Elysian Field, or an afterlife fishing hole), but they're really portals, the way all sounds are. Tune the dial and the frequency changes.

Andoe often locates his frequency in the shapes of his Tulsa youth. For a while he didn't like to talk about where his imagery came from, not from embarrassment or secrecy or posturing but because he didn't think it was important. Like the lights and cables around a movie set: "you pan away from the set, it kills the magic." But people like knowing these things. His subjects aren't riddles. He thinks of them as colors that he dips into.

Maybe that moment in your life feels true because your frontal cortex is still opened, like a record skipping. He says his record skipped when he was 18, stoned, sitting in his car on a dirt road at the edge of town, which is when he realized how beautiful everything is. There's no irony in this realization, which is what his paintings are like, too: dry, straight on.

This is an abbreviated presentation: four recent paintings. When you put on a show this succinct, something funny happens: the power of each painting expands. There's an alchemy of effort. Or as Joe says: you get your hit.

Four paintings don't provide much cover. There's no space at all to hide, which suits just fine. The spareness of the imagery becomes amplified. The hum fills the room. These paintings don't form a deliberate body of work, unless you consider the sweep of Andoe's project a distinctly American one, unified less by intention than by mood.

The figurative focus is a kind of feint. Not a trick, exactly, but also not the point. Andoe thinks of them as abstractions, shapes lifted from the material plane and reformed, a body given new purchase. Andoe's technique is to apply a thick layer of oil paint to his surfaces, marking the outlines, and then wiping away the wet paint. The result reveals the dyed grain of the fine canvas linen underneath, a textural thrust that joins them to American minimalist painters like Ryman and Kelly.

There's a painting of a tree trunk that's more of the suggestion of a tree trunk, a silhouette, half there and half not, sturdy but letting the static in. It surges up the canvas, dialing the tuner back to AbEx's muscular gestures. Barnett Newman described his paintings as pulling Excalibur from the stone, a gentle hand finessing the composition into existence.

Andoe's Excalibur resides in a common sturdiness, sublime in its plainness. That's the real trick: persuading the image out of its absence while letting its absence remain. You can feel their hum reverberating, rushing back at you, head on.

- Max Lakin, critic and writer