

Matt Hoyt & Tom Thayer

I Want to Climb Through the Windows of My Eyes and Become Static Electricity

November 2 - December 14, 2024

The first time I encountered Tom Thayer was around 2007. He was participating in an evening of performance at ISSUE Project Room in Brooklyn, which I believe Jay Sanders had organized. Tom's performance is the only thing I can clearly remember from that night. Tom, a tall and lanky guy, was standing over a phonograph player placed on the floor. He made a quick introduction of himself, mentioning something about his father, then proceeded to manipulate a cardboard marionette resembling a bird; a stork or a heron, perhaps? The long, scrawny neck of the bird, controlled by some sort of jury-rigged wire contraption, lunged up and down, poking its beak at an LP spinning on the turntable near its feet. Apparently a phonograph needle was attached to the tip of the beak. Loud bursts of all sorts of screeching, skipping, stuttering, scratching noises were released out into the room for, maybe, five minutes. I wasn't sure what I thought of this artwork or this guy in general.

Months or years later, after our social circles had overlapped, Tom gave me a copy of a record he had recorded in Nashville. He told me he'd spent approximately a year working on this with the intention of it being used in his performances, or "scenographic plays" as he calls them. This is the record that those jarring blips of bird noise were coming out of. For me, this record served as a key to understanding Tom and his work. There are a lot of artists who would make a record, but Tom is an artist who would make a record in order to make a play.

In conversations about our own artistic influences and formative experiences, Tom has mentioned his recollection of seeing a certain exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2004. This exhibition, titled *Kai Kein Respekt (Kai No Respect)*, was the first museum survey of the multimedia artist Kai Althoff. Tom recalls being impressed, not only by the overall sensibility of Althoff's work, but specifically by the artist's ability to skip from one medium or discipline to another with seamless success. While there is a clear affinity in this regard between the two artists, I can't get myself to use the terms "multimedia" or "interdisciplinary" when describing what Tom does. Instead, I'd say there is an amorphous spirit at the core of it all, possessing the ability to temporarily assume various forms. Slipping in and out of each with ease, as a hermit crab may squat a shell for the time being. Like a ball of mercury, as soon as one thinks they've put their finger on it, the thing splits, darting back into its own elusive nature. This unshakable affinity with all things that will forever remain elusive, or ineffable, is the common ground between my creative pursuit and that of Tom Thayer.

—Matt Hoyt, Yorktown Heights, NY, 2024

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An artist will never see their work the way their audience does. They see it muddled with the hopes, failures, reworkings, surprises, undetectable influences, etc., of its coming into being. So, artists maintain consortiums of trusted eyes and minds who can see the work with the clarity of an audience. For fifteen years, Matt Hoyt and I have been trusted eyes and minds for one another.

Throughout those years, Matt and I bonded over our shared interests in art and music. We've talked for hours on end about Maria Martinez's pottery, Forrest Bess's paintings, the Philadelphia Wireman's sculpture, Jean Dubuffet's music, Jean Arp's poetry, Yutaka Tanaka's Post-Industrial cassettes, C.O.B.'s *Spirit of Love*, Fluxus music, Modernism, contemporary art, Art Brut, art therapy, children's art, tempera paints, the sound of rain, the sound of the wind, the sound of rocks—but what we mostly talked about is our artwork.

I've always been drawn to artwork that serves a function, as its functional aspect can occupy the artist's mind, freeing the more critical aspects to be made from a deeper place. Matt's paintings and sculptures are functional. His paintings are created through a meditative and therapeutic process, and his sculptures are made as an exercise in dealing with fears. Their functions make way for the development of secondary lines of communication that feel at once alien to my mind and familiar on a cellular level. Matt's work embraces being multiple things at once. It is natural and artificial. It is hard-edged and wonky. It is of this world and alien. It reminds me of looking at a newborn infant and seeing a form that isn't fully set in this world. The first time I saw one of his sculptures, I couldn't tell if I was looking at the skeleton of something someone had come across in the woods or an antenna for some unknown transmission. I now realize that, for me, those two scenarios are the same thing in Matt's work. It's not that the work doesn't hit me over the head with answers; it's that the work reminds me that no matter what we are clinging to in this life, there are no answers, and there never, ever will be.

Matt and I are two individualistic artists exploring personal, handcrafted worlds. We are both somewhat outsiders, which can be a lonely place to work, so we are lucky to have one another.

—Tom Thayer, Maum Sinn, NJ, 2024

Matt Hoyt (b. 1975, Mount Kisco, NY; lives and works in New York) received a BFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Solo and two-person exhibitions include *Vessels and Lights*, Bureau at ECHO, Cologne, Germany (2022); *Note To You*, Bureau, New York, NY (2021); *Einig*, with Tom Thayer, Stations, Berlin, Germany (2019); *Six Winds*, Bureau, New York, NY (2019); *Chrysalis*, Bureau, New York, NY (2017); *Recent Past, 2010-2016*, Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, NY (2016); *One Another*, Art in General, New York, NY (2015); *It's Always Nice to Meet You*, Bureau, New York, NY (2014); *2006-2011*, Bureau, New York, NY (2012); *Escalator to Common Art*, with Mark Van Yetter, Dispatch, New York, NY (2008). Group exhibitions include *Mystics of the World Unite*, organized by Bob Nickas, Sevil Dolmaci, Istanbul, Turkey (2023); Looking Back: White Columns Annual, selected by Mary Manning, White Columns, New York, NY (2022); *Objects Like Us*, curated by Amy Smith-Stewart and David Adamo, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2018); *Strange Attractors*, curated by Bob Nickas, Redling Fine Art, Los Angeles, CA (2017); *Sunlight arrives only at its proper hour*, curated Mitchell Alagus and Olivia Shao, 356 Mission, Los Angeles, CA (2017); 2012 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2012); Greater New York, MoMA PS1, New York, NY (2010); Looking Back: White Columns Annual, selected by Jay Sanders, White Columns, New York, NY (2008). In 2013 Hoyt received the Grants to Artists Award from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. His work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, and the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, NY.

Tom Thayer (b. 1970, Chicago Heights, IL; lives and works in New Jersey) is a Professor of Painting, Drawing, and Diverse Media at the City College of New York. Solo and two-person exhibitions include *What you wonder about is what you know— as well as the other way around.*, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY (2022); *Einig*, Matt Hoyt & Tom Thayer, Stations, Berlin, Germany (2019); *Make a Pinch Pot Out of Your Mouth*, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY (2019). Group exhibitions include *Le Contre-Ciel*, curated by Olivia Shao, Empty Gallery, Hong Kong (2024); *Nurikabe*, Tetsuo's Garage, Nikko, Japan (2019); *I got the Moon in the Morning and the Sun at Night*, WallRiss Gallery, Fribourg, Switzerland (2019); 2012 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2012); Looking Back: The White Columns Annual, selected by Jay Sanders, White Columns, New York, NY (2008). Performances include Tom and Henry Thayer for Abasement 66, organized by Joe Frivaldi, Artists Space, New York, NY (2023); Matt Hoyt and Tom Thayer, Loong Mah, New York, NY (2021); An Evening with Tom Thayer, Modern Mondays, curated by Stephanie Webber, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2013). His work is in the collections of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; and The Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH.