

# TARGETS





TARGETS  
Joshua Abelow



*Targets, 2024 Bear folding chairs, stacks of targets, Diet Pepsi can, dimensions variable*

Targets  
Tisch Abelow

A man named Hugh Day and his girlfriend Chelsea Vermont sat on a checkerboard blanket on a hill. About four hundred other people sat on this same hill. At the bottom there was a stage and some rows of chairs filled with more people. Hugh Day and Chelsea Vermont arrived an hour early so they could find the perfect spot for a picnic. The show would be starting in thirty minutes. Hugh and Chelsea brought chips, ham-and-cheese sandwiches, cantaloupe, and Diet Pepsi. "Everyone *always* packs supper when they come *here*," Chelsea said the day before. They'd gone to the supermarket with their coupons and bought all the necessary foods.

Chelsea Vermont is thirty years old; likes to make crafts. She has a job planting shrubs at the zoo. She knows all about shrubs, all the different names, all their shapes and sizes. Chelsea shares a townhouse in an average neighborhood with Hugh Day, but she makes their yard look better than anyone else's on the block. She curls her hair in the morning, making her bangs perfectly round. She is five feet tall and has smirky lips smeared with pink lipstick. Today she's wearing tight jeans that taper at the ankles and a white sweater with a picture of a teddy bear sewn-on the front.

Hugh Day is fifty years old; a man who dyes his hair brown, but it always comes out blotchy. The top of his head looks like a portal to somewhere else because there's a shiny bald spot in the middle. Every day he feels the top of his head to see if the portal has grown larger. Then he gently combs his hair over to cover it up. Sometimes he forgets to comb his hair in the morning and his co-workers pretend not to notice. Chelsea doesn't say anything either because she's afraid of hurting his feelings. Hugh is colorblind and usually wears mismatched socks. Today he is wearing a plaid shirt tucked into his high waisted jeans along with his favorite jacket. It's bright red with his name 'Hugh Day' written in black cursive above the upper right hand pocket.

It was a cool evening; cloudless and clear.

"I picked the perfect night to come, huh?" Hugh said.

"Sure did, honey—not a cloud in the sky."

"Just look at all these people."

"It's a crowd all right."

"I was smart to order the tickets so long ago, huh?"

"Sure was, honey—even got a discount."

Hugh smiled at the couple on the checkerboard blanket beside theirs.

"Don't you think it's time we started eating?" Chelsea said.

"Well, if you're hungry, honey, go ahead."

Chelsea opened the cooler to find a package of cookies with a note inside. "Now, Hugh," she said, surprised. "What's this?"

"I picked up some cookies at the supermarket when you weren't looking," he said. "I know you like them."

"Aw, Hugh, that's so sweet." She stuffed one of the cookies into her mouth. "And what's this?"

"A little poem I wrote. I'll read it to you." Hugh took it from her hands as she ate another cookie. He read it very slowly saying:

*The moment you're born you're dying.  
The clock starts ticking  
And the Grim Reaper...  
The Grim Reaper  
He starts keeping your time*

*The day you're born.  
He's like an hourglass  
That has been turned over  
And the sands of time  
Start running out.*

Hugh put down the poem feeling proud, and Chelsea gave a little smile.

"Now, Hugh, *that* wasn't a poem," she said.

"Sure it is, honey." He took a cookie from the bag. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"Well, I don't know," she said. Her chin tripled as she leaned over for a sip of Diet Pepsi.

"Sure it is, honey," he repeated. "Sure it is." Hugh ate another cookie.

"You're going to get a stomachache, Hugh—eating all those cookies. You should have a sandwich." Chelsea handed him one from the cooler. Hugh paused and looked at her. He had a vision of his mother. "You have to eat everything off your plate," his mother used to say. Hugh remembered how his younger brother Alec would leave a little bit of everything on his plate. Hugh never did that.

\*

Hugh was left alone sitting in the family room watching cartoons the day his mother and father brought Alec home as a newborn baby. He was often left alone. His father went on secret trips, and his mother disappeared into her studio to paint without telling him. Every day after school he prayed to God that there might be a parent at home to keep him company. He was lucky if that happened twice a month and when it did, his mother would say she was tired and would take a nap. She'd wake up to make dinner or more likely, microwave leftovers. "You have to

eat everything off your plate,” said his mother.

His mother had black hair that she wore up in a bun. Men found her attractive and she used that to her advantage. Her smile fooled them. It often fooled Hugh.

When his parents returned from the hospital with Alec, Hugh could hear the rustles and whispers of his parents carrying all the new baby equipment. Then he heard the baby whimper. He already hated baby Alec. Hugh curled up on the couch and pretended he was a ghost.

“Hugh, you have a new brother,” his mother said.

Hugh continued watching television without acknowledging his parents. He didn’t understand why they had another child since they didn’t want him.

“Hugh,” his mother raised her voice. “We’re talking to you.”

His father turned off the television. Hugh got up and went to his room and cried. He could hear his parents talking in the kitchen.

“I don’t know what came over him,” he overheard his mother say.

Hugh’s tears stopped, and he went numb. He was six years old. He only cried twice the rest of his life; once when his high school sweetheart broke his heart, and once when his father died.

Alec attempted suicide five times before his parents decided it would be a good idea if he got help. They never mentioned this to any of the other family members or friends. He saw a psychologist four times a week—Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. His parents complained about the money. Alec told the doctor that he’d asked for some paints on

his birthday, but all he got was a ten-dollar gift certificate to Staples. He told the doctor that he loved to paint but his mother would never show him her studio. He told the doctor that his brother ignored him unless they were out back shooting at targets near a row of shrubs. He told the doctor that his mother often took naps, especially when he asked her to help him with his homework. He told the doctor he was ugly. He told the doctor that he sometimes thought about killing his parents and that’s what kept him from successfully killing himself. The doctor told his parents that he was nuts, so his family sent him to a mental institution.

Hugh was relieved when his brother went away; Alec had been getting too much attention. Nobody visited Alec for six months.

Alec called home, and Hugh picked up the phone. “Hugh?”

“Yes? Who’s speaking?”

“It’s your brother, Alec.”

“Oh.” Hugh paused. “How are you doing?” Hugh was almost nineteen now.

“Fine...what are you guys up to?”

“Not much.” Another pause. Hugh was looking in the refrigerator for something to eat.

“Do you think you guys have time to visit me?”

“I don’t know. I’d have to check with Mom.”

“The doctors tell me that I’m almost ready to leave.”

“That’s good.” Hugh shut the refrigerator. “Well, I have to go now. I have to work on some stuff.”

“Okay...well...bye.”

“Bye.” They hung up.

After some time passed, the doctor told Alec’s parents that he was ready to come home. The doctor told Alec his mother and father would be there at six o’clock to pick him up. Alec sat on top of his bags waiting across the street from an empty parking lot. His parents arrived at eight o’clock. His mother gave him that fooling smile and took his hand. “How are you?” she asked.

“Where’s Dad?” Alec said.

“He couldn’t make it. Business trip,” his mother said.

The car ride home was quiet.

The next day, Hugh asked Alec to go target shooting. They gathered the guns and went into the backyard. It was a cool day; cloudless and clear. Before long they ran out of bullets, and Hugh went back to the house while Alec waited in the grass.

“Mom, we’re out of bullets,” Hugh said. The kitchen smelled of burnt vegetables.

“No more bullets?” she said. “I’ll drive to town and get you boys more.”

Hugh watched her drive down the long gravel driveway in her white station wagon and headed back to sit with Alec.

“Where’d Mom go?” Alec picked at the grass.

“She’s going into town to get more bullets. There weren’t any in the house.”

“Mom went into town to get bullets?”

“Yeah.”

Both of them were quiet after that. Alec continued playing with the grass. A while later, they heard the white station wagon shuffling up the driveway.

“There’s Mom,” Hugh said, getting up. “I’ll be right back.” He ran toward the house as Alec leaned back in the grass staring at the sun. He stared at the sun until his eyes started to water.

“What are you doing, Alec?” Hugh said when he returned. “You’re going to blind yourself.” Alec rubbed his eyes and looked at the shadow cutting across the back of the house. Their mom waved from the back door window. Alec looked at the targets. They seemed to be moving in circles like wheels, dancing; circles, dancing. Alec picked up the gun.

Hugh handed him some bullets and Alec loaded the gun. The brothers walked farther away from the house, toward the chain link fence. The sun gleamed down. Hugh took the first shot and Alec followed. After four shots, Alec put the gun to his right temple and pulled the trigger. Hugh dropped his gun as Alec fell to the ground, and the grass was dyed red.

\*

Hugh Day took the ham and cheese sandwich from Chelsea Vermont’s hand.

“Are you okay, honey?” she asked.

“Yes.” He took a bite of the sandwich. “This is really good, have you tried one yet?”

“Hugh,” she laughed. “I already ate one.”

The sun had set and the sky was much darker than when they arrived. Hugh Day and Chelsea Vermont sat on the checkerboard blanket finishing their supper. They looked down the hill at the silhouettes of overgrown shrubs around the empty stage. Even at dusk, Chelsea could tell that the shrubs needed to be sheared.



Photographs



*Shopping Center, Frederick, MD, 2023 C-print, 4 x 6 inches*



*Parking Lot, Frederick, MD, 2023 C-print, 4 x 6 inches*



*Front Yard, Frederick, MD, 2023 C-print, 4 x 6 inches*



*Backyard, Frederick, MD, 2023 C-print, 4 x 6 inches*



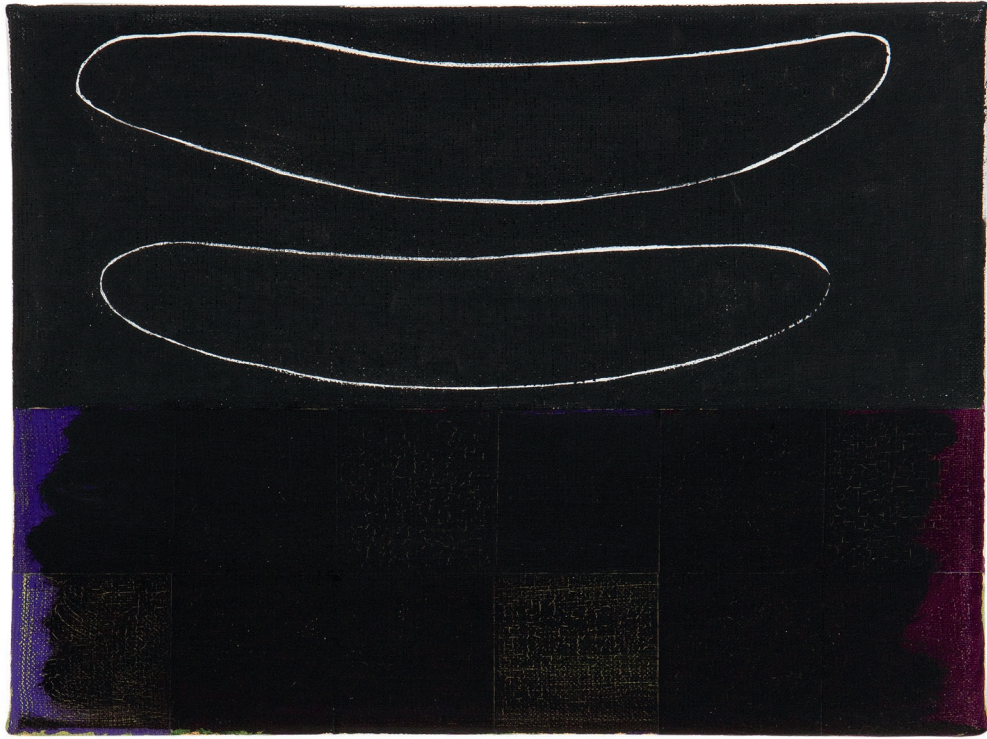
*Shopping Center, Frederick, MD, 2023 C-print, 4 x 6 inches*

Paintings



Untitled, 2024 Oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches

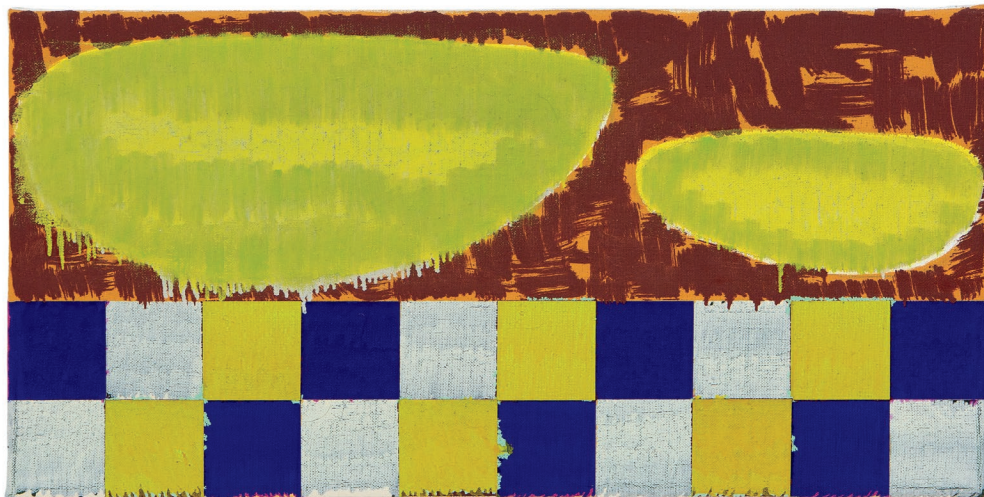
Untitled, 2023 Oil on linen, 10 x 20 inches



Untitled, 2023 Oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches



Untitled, 2023 Oil on linen, 10 x 20 inches



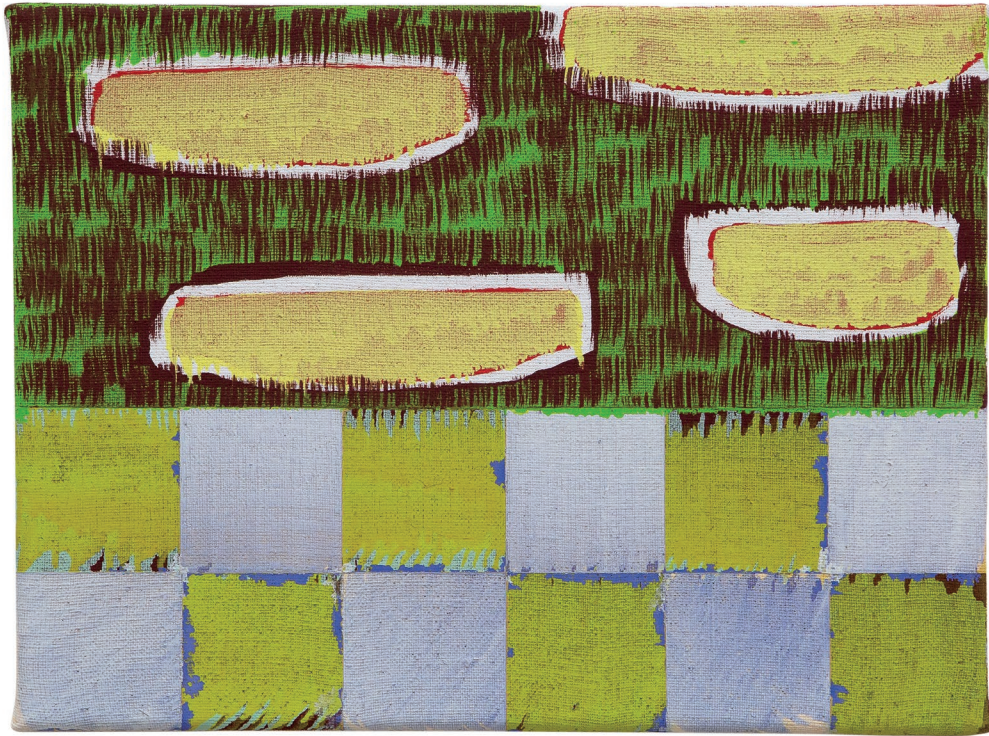
Untitled, 2024 Oil on linen, 9 x12 inches



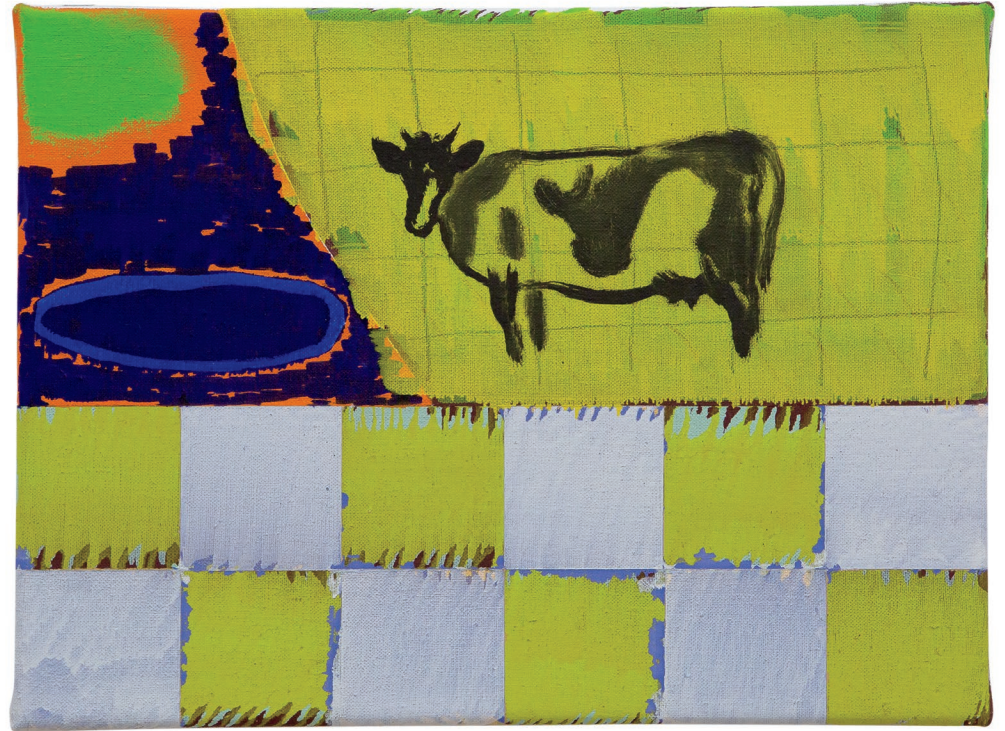
*H-Man*, 2024 Oil on linen, 24 x 12 inches



*H-Man*, 2024 Oil on linen, 24 x 12 inches



Untitled, 2022 Oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches



Untitled, 2022 Oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches



**Peter Eide:** I'm into the overlapping forms with the painting and photography. It's wild to see your work flirt with hyper sophistication – there's a weight to these new paintings. It's a vibe, for sure. I haven't quite put my finger on it.

I like the added meta context of the images of you. They give life to the work, and there's a slightly nerdy, yet endearing quality in the way in which the paintings become deconstructed. You seem to be in a new phase; letting yourself hang out in the work - warts and all. The hermetic quality of the earlier paintings has relaxed into a confident painterliness that I'm excited about.

The photograph of the irregular oval median with the tree connects with the forms in your recent paintings.

Then, I see a cow, and the repeated form of the oval now gives me a playful, alien abduction type of tableau – elevated Rorschachs in the shape of UFO Tic Tacs. It's funny and absurd in equal measure.

**Joshua Abelow:** I think the photos of me (taken mostly by Katya, two by Tisch) are nice to include as a subtext to the exhibition in the form of this book. You and I were talking about Bas Jan Ader the other night and I'd say that *In Search of the Miraculous (One Night in Los Angeles)* (1973) has been a point of reference. I like that Ader's work is deeply personal and romantic. In the context of which he was a part, the burgeoning conceptual art movement in Los Angeles, it was unusual to be so emotional and I'm sure that's part of the reason it's taken decades for his work to grow in popularity. When he went missing in 1975 (the year before I was born) he wasn't well known and it remained that way for a long time. In terms of the *One Night in Los Angeles* piece – I like that his wife took the photos of him wandering around holding up a flashlight. It's very comical and very sad at the same time.

**PE:** *In Search of the Miraculous* is about searching for the unknown; a perfect metaphor to express the experience of artistic experimentation. Chartering an impossibly small boat across the

sea is risky, and his disappearance raises a lot of questions. Ader is like Houdini performing one final, disappearing act.

This synthesizes with the persona of Freddy you've created. There is an element of mystique surrounding you, deliberate on your part, calculating a mysteriousness that invites the viewer to investigate further. It's a game of Texas Hold 'em in that you keep your cards close to your vest – whether or not you're holding a royal flush or bluffing becomes immaterial. The fact that you obstruct a full view contributes to the intrigue; the resonance occurs not when you lay your cards on the table, but rather through a carefully curated 'trickling out' of only what you care to share with the world – decisions cultivated through a deliberate selection.

To circle back to the idea of deconstruction: you're figuratively lifting the curtain of your mystery a bit. We get to see the goofy, flawed vulnerable artist of-a-certain-age, in his awkward, sophisticated glory, injecting the paintings with a level of humanity reminiscent of the exuberance and delight of your drawings (the drawings I saw on Delancey Street before we first met years ago). I see you looking at motifs and forms in the wild, that I'm also viewing in the photos you took of various real-life objects, and then in the resulting paintings – it makes me feel like I'm peering inside your mind.

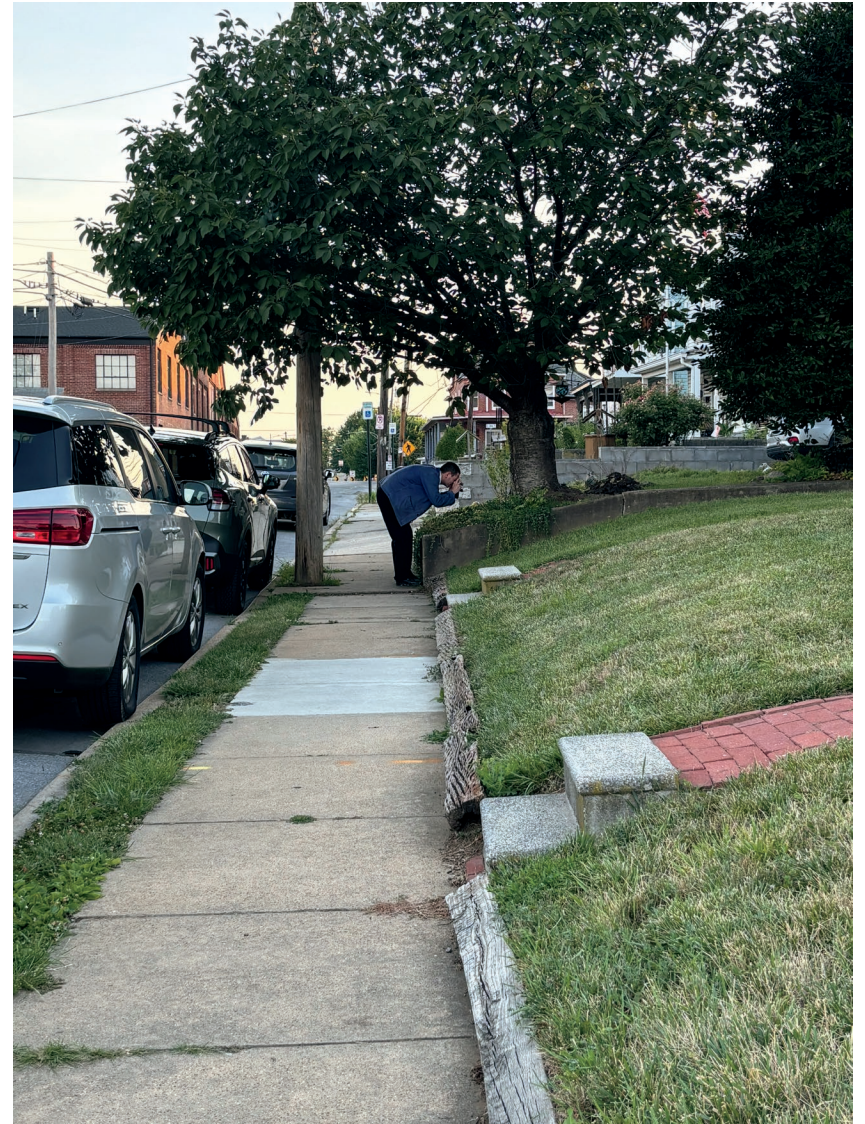
**JA:** I've never inserted myself into the work quite so directly (as these images of me taking photos). Which is kind of funny considering I didn't even know the photographs were being taken.

**PE:** I've been thinking about stages of life lately – in a general sense. Regarding my own life and work, I feel like I've entered a new phase. These feelings are accompanied by a desire to shift my aesthetic sensibilities into new, experimental, and unknown territories. I can't pinpoint what brought about this desire, because I believe the catalyst is more nebulous; I'm certain many factors such as potentially exhausting certain languages that

have permeated my work for the last ten years have something to do with it. But, I'm curious – I've known you for ten years at this point and you seem to be in a new phase. Am I correct in this observation? I know you've had some tremendous life changes as of recent, and I'm curious to know how they've affected you and your work, if at all. I'm seeing some things with *Targets* that indicate a relaxation in some of the more formal, academically rigorous qualities in your previous bodies of work. But also, some of the paintings appear miraculously more serious and studied. It also appears that you're wearing some Ab Ex heroes on your sleeve a bit more, as if you're more comfortable with them. Do you find any resonance in this? I'm getting some contradicting truths, which makes the work more unpredictable and compelling – like you're creating jazz music.

**JA:** Since reconnecting with Katya, now more than three years ago, time folds in on itself in ways that are equally bizarre, magical, and seemingly 'meant to be.' I've been thinking about fate and, in particular, my fate. I'm doing my best to trust my intuitive decision-making abilities. I'm allowing more 'play' in the paintings. And I'm interested in this relationship that is evolving between my paintings and my photographs of Frederick. I think there's a general feeling of return – returning to something that was left behind. Maybe this is what happens in middle age – we stop rushing forward. We become more comfortable with the present and with looking back.

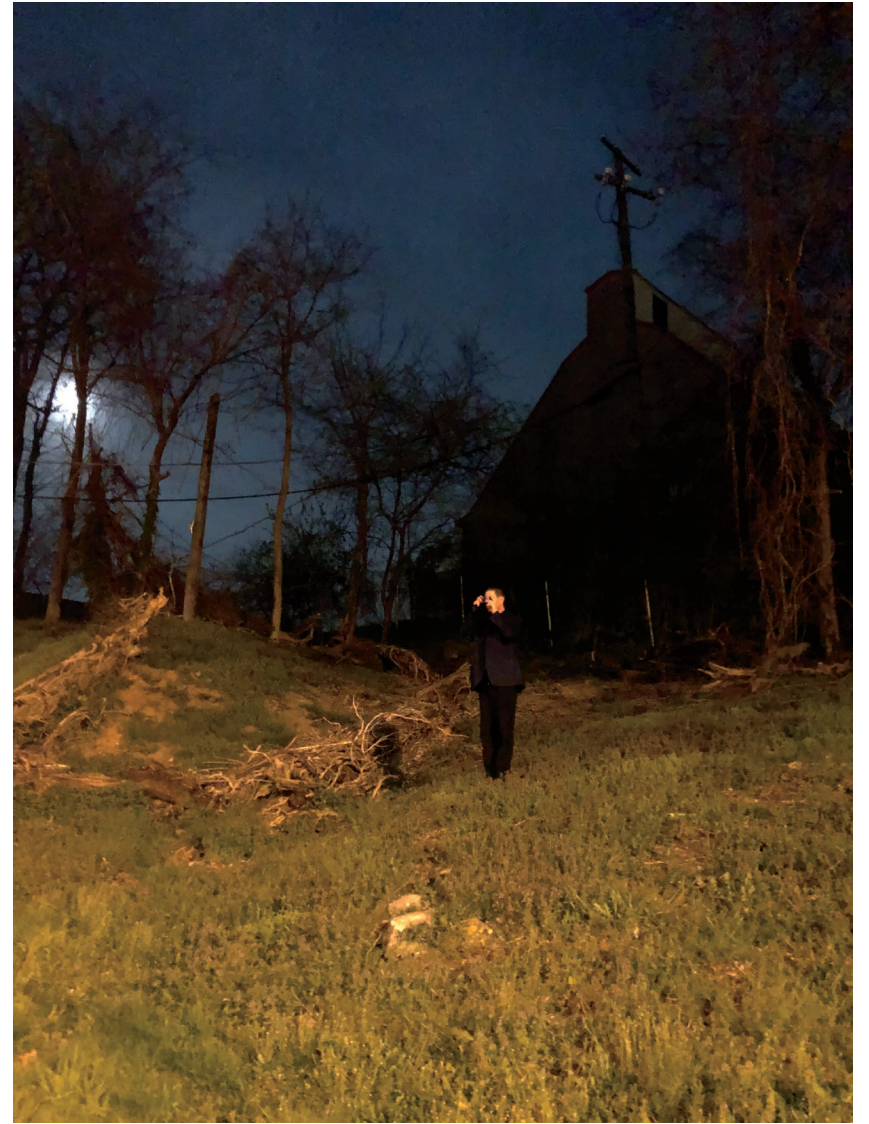
In Search of the Mundane  
2023-2024

















## TARGETS

Joshua Abelow

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Joshua Abelow is an artist and curator based in Harris, NY. In 2014, Abelow founded Freddy in Baltimore, later moving the project upstate in 2016.

Peter Eide is an artist and curator based in New Windsor, MD (where Clyfford Still lived and worked from 1966 until his death in 1980). In 2021, Eide founded Maurice, a Baltimore-based curatorial project focusing on experimentation.

All photographs of Joshua Abelow taken in Frederick, MD by Katya Kirilloff and/or Tisch Abelow.

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5200 Glen Arm Road  
Glen Arm, MD 21057  
[www.spce.gallery](http://www.spce.gallery)

*Freddy*

Harris, NY 12742  
[www.freddygallery.biz](http://www.freddygallery.biz)





