

Art in America

REVIEWS JAN. 18, 2017

Ginny Casey

NEW YORK,
at Half

by Eric Sutphin



Ginny Casey: *Drawer Game*, 2016, oil on canvas, 43 by 40 inches; at Half.

Ginny Casey's paintings often cast objects and human forms in allegories for making. On view in her recent exhibition at Half Gallery, for instance, *The Potter's Legs* (2014) depicts a purple-fleshed figure struggling to carry a vaguely ear-shaped form toward a large block of gray clay draped with a cutting wire, the image capturing the sense of an artist's clumsy crawl toward resolution. The influence of Philip Guston is apparent throughout Casey's work. In the mid-1960s, Guston began to isolate studio tools and trappings in a series of paintings, a strategy that would culminate in some of his most iconic and personal images, such as *The Painter's Table* (1973). Casey demonstrates a similar technique, creating paintings that suggest still lifes but are more like narrative tableaux that play with the distinction between the living and the inanimate.

Casey's paint handling is soft, and she uses a variety of stippling techniques, applying dryish pigment to the canvas and at times wiping or scraping the paint away to model her bulbous vessels and body parts, which seem cast in dusky and diffuse light. In *Drawer Game* (2016), a blue hand hovers over a birdhouse-like box with a hole through which a curious eye peeks. A brown foot pops out from the bottom of the box, while a large blue ear lies on the floor below the table on which the box sits. *Hands in Vases* (2016) shows one hand emerging from a celadon vase and another from a dirty golden vase. The hands are like coconspirators in some unknown task, as the former points down to the latter, which touches a knife lying below it.

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landscape, a violet-colored vessel that resembles an owl and is perched on a branch turns toward a dark purple fluted vase, the two appearing to be in dialogue. These vignettes are rendered in shallow, tightly cropped pictorial space. The objects are pushed to the front of the picture plane, producing a theatrical effect, as if the drama were unfolding front-row center in a small theater.

Casey synthesizes the influences of painters ranging from Milton Avery to Morandi to Guston in wholly original paintings that cast a universe of specific objects (invented or real) in scenes that celebrate play and creative mischief. *Pink Block* (2016) shows two eyes peering from deep within a hollowed-out coral-colored cube that rests on two blue bodily stumps. Casey frequently portrays mysterious spaces where impish figures and objects lie in wait, ready to be called out into the open, her scenes enlivened with anticipatory energy. Her paintings suggest that the artist's studio is a world in which myriad unexpected things dwell.