

LEE MAXEY: WAIT HERE

OLYMPIA

By Marissa Graziano / May 2, 2024

Lee Maxey's solo exhibition *Wait Here* at Olympia is a choreographed look inside religious indoctrination, surveillance, and control. From the sidewalk, the only text-based painting in the show, *What is Death*, confronts viewers with a pepto-pink prompt. The existential punctuation hangs in the window with neighboring landscapes that quietly beg the question. Waiting inside the gallery are fifteen, small-scale egg tempera paintings and an artists' book. Maxey sets the bait with a nostalgia-tinged primary school palette, pulling the viewer in close with her methodical application of paint, and never letting go.



Lee Maxey, *Don't Move*, 2023, Egg tempera on panel, 6.25 x 8.5 x 1 in (15.9 x 21.6 x 2.5 cm), courtesy the artist and Olympia

Wait Here captures the romantic and complicated concept of 'simpler times' often idealized in the South. Paintings of fiddlesticks and tricky triangles

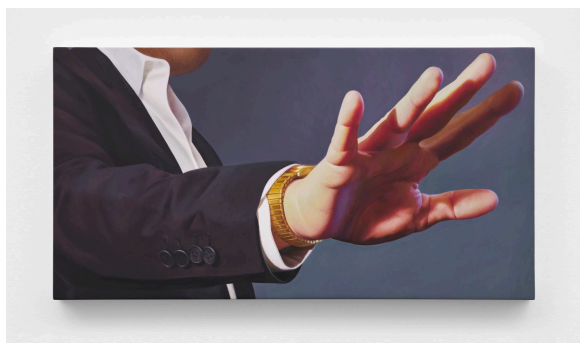
place viewers in their local Cracker Barrel, eagerly awaiting biscuits and corn muffins to arrive at the table. These games are educational toys that teach focus, precision, and strategy. When examined in the context of the Bible Belt, titles like *Don't Move*, *Take it From Here* and *Stay Focused* carry more nefarious meaning. These phrases perform as authoritative instruction laced with warning.



Lee Maxey, *Take It from Here*, 2023, Egg tempera on panel, 6 x 9 x 1 in (15.2 x 22.9 x 2.5 cm), courtesy the artist and Olympia

The images are emotionally and metaphorically loaded. Triangles perform as both a queer symbol and a reference to the trinity. A door could hold a closet, a lock hides a secret, and so on with each object possessing threatening qualities under a seemingly playful guise. Commercially set against glassy blues, pops of pinks, and mute grays, the

paintings encourage a sense of dissociation. We're left looking at the objects but also through them to the empty color beyond. The largest piece, *Take a Moment*, places the viewer in a game of fiddlesticks. Vertically oriented, the shape limits narrative and gives the painting an altarpiece quality – even referential to a crucifix. Are we being instructed to take longer for our turn, or called to group prayer? The overscaled fiddlesticks make the old-timey toy feel like a pile of stakes. When juxtaposed with a screw, both become symbols for the cross and stigmata. She orchestrates this without irony, understanding that only through lovingly painting these objects, can she examine the romantic stillness of prayer with the self awareness of a skeptic.



Lee Maxey, *Pay Attention*, 2024, Egg tempera on panel, 10 x 19.25 x 1.25 in (25.4 x 48.9 x 3.2 cm), courtesy the artist and Olympia

Maxey navigates the labyrinth of the religious south through synchronized instructions played out in the titles. This guided 'Simon Says' experience of moving throughout the space creates a power structure under the guise of trust and playfulness. In *Pay Attention* the figure of a pastor presents as a symbol of institutional authority. The only figurative painting in the show, it captures the clergy's posture in a flamboyant gesture of conviction and gives form to an otherwise omnipotent presence pointing us towards something. What that something is, is

enough to create a sense of curiosity, suspicion and urgency that recalibrates the pace of the show.

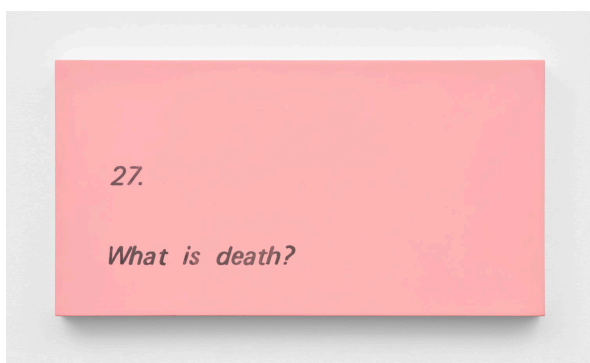


Lee Maxey, *Look Here*, 2023, Egg tempera on panel, 15 x 12 x 1.25 in (38.1 x 30.5 x 3.2 cm), courtesy the artist and Olympia

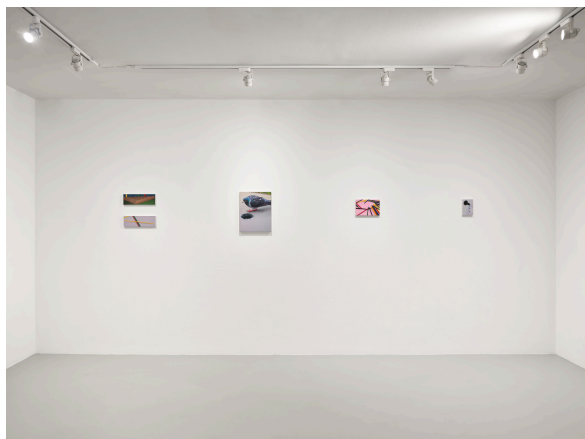
Maxey has an acute ability to underline moments of mundanity with overarching dread. Her cropped compositions obligate a tight focus; she never lets us scan or see the whole scene. Frequently we have a sense that just outside our periphery, Big Brother – in this case maybe Pastor Ben – is watching. Paranoia hangs in the air as we're guided through a series of interior spaces and quiet still lifes by an unknown other. Is it the man from *Pay Attention*? Who is he and what is he trying to tell us? These devices create a profound sense of anxiety at every turn until confronted with the pivotal "gotcha!" moment. In *Look Here*, a pigeon's blood red eye doubles as a recording symbol. This bird does not feel real. It tells us where to look – not at the hole in the pavement, but directly to camera and, presumably, the person

watching on the other end. The painting's central placement in the gallery sets up a cat and mouse pursuit in search of the exit.

Leaving the gallery, I'm reminded of the three paintings hanging in the window that initially greeted me. Upon second viewing, the question appears to have answered itself. *What is Death?* The Pink Pearl eraser asks. *Here. There. Happy?*



Lee Maxey, *What is Death?*, 2024, Egg tempera and graphite on panel, 10 x 19.25 x 1.25 in (25.4 x 48.9 x 3.2 cm), courtesy the artist and Olympia



Installation Views, Lee Maxey, *Wait Here*, Olympia, 2024, courtesy the artist and Olympia

“[Lee Maxey: Wait Here](#),” Olympia, 41 Orchard Street, New York, NY. Through May 11, 2024.

Lee Maxey received her MFA from Boston University (2016) and her BFA from the University of Central Arkansas (2011). Selected solo and two-person exhibitions include: Olympia (Solo, New York, NY, 2024, 2021); 12.26 Gallery (Solo, Dallas, TX, 2023); Yutaka Kikutake Gallery (Two-person, Tokyo, JPN, 2023); the artist-run space Hercules Art/Studio Program, (Solo, New York, NY, 2019). Recent group shows include: Felix Art Fair (12.26, Los Angeles, CA, 2024); Marathon Gallery, (Ellenville, NY, 2023); Able Baker Contemporary (Portland, ME, 2021); The Bureau of General Services: Queer Division (New York, NY, 2019).

Forthcoming projects include: miart, (Group, Olympia, Milan, ITA, 2024); Deanna Evans Project (Group, New York, NY, 2024); and artist-residency culminating in an exhibition at NARANJO 131 (Group, Mexico City, MEX, 2024-25).

A solo presentation of Lee's work at NADA Miami (Miami, FL, 2022) was selected for the Curated Spotlight by Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels. Maxey was an Artist in Residence at the Hercules Studio/Art Program (New York, NY, 2019) and at the Fire Island Artist Residency (Fire Island, NY, 2018). Maxey lives and works in Brooklyn, NY and teaches painting at Brooklyn College.

About the author: Marissa Graziano is an interdisciplinary artist based in New York. She is the Co-Founder and Director of Greene House Gallery in Brooklyn.