

Boston Globe

Sam Cady stretches the bounds of painting with shaped canvas

At Howard Yezerksi Gallery, the artist explores the space between realism and abstraction in 'Anything: More Parts of the Whole, Old and New'

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated November 15, 2022, 1:05 p.m.



Sam Cady, "Half a Doublewide With Slant of Light," oil on shaped canvas. COURTESY OF HOWARD YEZERSKI GALLERY

Self-portraits, childhood drawings, and studies for paintings fill “The Life Wall” installation in “Sam Cady: Anything: More Parts of the Whole, Old and New,” at Howard Yezerski Gallery. There’s also a grid of photos depicting how the artist shapes a painting, “Windswept Cypress, SF.”



Installation view of "Windswept Cypress, SF" at Howard Yezerski Gallery. COURTESY OF HOWARD YEZERSKI GALLERY

It’s one of those wildly meticulous artistic processes that’s at once daunting and brilliant. The wooden backing of a painting canvas is a stretcher. They’re usually rectangular, but Cady builds elaborate ones that hew to the contours of his subjects. One stretcher, before he has even affixed a canvas or picked up a brush, is available to see. If he hadn’t mounted a picture of the curve of hilly roadway he’ll paint there, you might mistake it for the outline of a map of Idaho.



Sam Cady, "Windswept Cypress, SF," oil on shaped canvas. COURTESY OF HOWARD YEZERSKI GALLERY

These flat shapes emphasize form, a central tenet of [abstraction](#). But in paint he evokes realism: The notched, pointy, jagged stretcher he created for "Windswept Cypress, SF" delineates edges of leaves, bark, and grass. But the graceful dance of his paintbrush conjures sunlit leaves sparkling across a deep, shadowy background.

In "Breakwater, Plymouth," there's no water, no sky, no fishing boat chugging to sea. There's simply the [rugged jetty](#) stretching to the distant horizon, where it makes a sharp right into a straight line that looks more like pebbles than boulders.

Absent the seascape, the piece lays bare how the eye discerns space — and indeed how depicting space works, as Cady foreshortens the stretch of jetty moving directly away from us. How we see space determines our kinesthetic sense of the world. It brings us into our bodies, and doing that, the artist plays with our sense of orientation. In "Sunflower," he puts us nose to leaf with a

bloom in profile, its petals streaming backward like hair on a windy day. This close, the leaves that surround it resemble mountains and valleys.



Sam Cady, "Sunflower," oil on cutout canvas mounted on wood. COURTESY OF HOWARD YEZERSKI GALLERY

He's a terrific painter, seeing things many miss. A couple of early works depict trailers. In "Half a Doublewide With Slant of Light" a honeyed sun ray pours onto a home, through a window, and into an empty room in a way that recalls [Edward Hopper](#). The work is a feast of clean, geometric lines.

Cady's keen tension between abstraction and realism distills what painting can do: enchant the eye and make a whole new world.

SAM CADY: ANYTHING: More Parts of the Whole, Old and New

At Howard Yezerski Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave., through Dec. 17. 617-262-0550