

HYPERALLERGIC

Tony Tasset Exposes the World's Frayed Canvas

I wanted to hate these artworks, then I wished to poke my finger through their holes, and finally they became a perfect aestheticization of the contemporary moment.

By Lori Waxman | June 1, 2025



Tony Tasset, *Brick Barrow*, 2025, bronze with patina, edition of 3 + 1 AP (image courtesy Corbett vs. Dempsey)

CHICAGO — Tony Tasset is the master of making things that are so bad they're good.

Over the course of the artist's long career, this has included a 30-foot-tall replica of his own eyeball, a cross assembled from Diet Coke cans, bronze magnolia trees forever in bloom, dirty snowmen that never melt, abstract expressionist canvases painted with condiments, and even a permanent metal rainbow, arced high across a film studio parking lot. Always these sculptures achieve a high degree of realism — those aren't actual soda cans. They tend to be funny at first, but not for long. Often, they're terrifically accessible yet for the wrong reasons, which is me admitting my own snobbery. Do most people understand all the levels of critique built into a 12-foot-tall fiberglass fawn, or do they just want to take a selfie with an overgrown lawn ornament? What I suspect is the answer to that question makes me very uncomfortable. Plus, I genuinely loved seeing that deer when it spent a few seasons grazing on the Chicago Riverwalk.

HYPERALLERGIC



Tony Tasset's "distressed painting (orange)" (2025), acrylic on canvas (left), and "Eagle" (2025), painted resin prototype of cast aluminum, edition of 3 + 1 AP (photo Lori Waxman/Hyperallergic)

In *Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!*, a show of recent paintings, sculpture, and video at Corbett vs. Dempsey, Tasset has done it again. The main event is his series of "distressed paintings," rectangular canvases that come in small, medium, and large sizes, each in a different rich hue, with areas deliberately shredded, punctured, or slashed. In a few places, stretcher bars peek through like bare skin. Worn patches reveal the structure of the canvas weave.

I wanted to hate these artworks, then I wished to poke my finger through their holes, and finally they became a perfect aestheticization of the contemporary moment. A pair of ripped Dolce and Gabbana boyfriend jeans cost \$1,295 and democracy, never mind my own sanity, is hanging by a thread. So much of great importance is frayed in the world right now. Tasset, ever focused on America, even remakes the national bird for this horror show: a sickly, squawking, and utterly hideous "Eagle" (2025), which isn't built by hand from bits of air-dry clay but sure looks it. That grotesque raptor, soon to be cast in aluminum (on display is a resin model), makes as good a candidate for a monument to today as the old-fashioned wooden cart lying broken and turned on its side in the middle of the gallery. "Brick Barrow" (2025) testifies to the wretched state of human labor, but not, ironically, to the formidable sweat and talent that went into creating the spot-on patinated bronze replica of a brick barrow, about 15% larger than life-size, which is what it actually is.

HYPERALLERGIC



Tony Tasset, “My Lear” (2025), 4K video, duration: 4 minutes, 40 seconds, edition of 3 + 1 AP (image courtesy Corbett vs. Dempsey)

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! is named for a line spoken by King Lear in the Shakespearean play. The phrase begins a monologue, the entirety of which Tasset delivers in a five-minute video, that ends with the line, “I am a man more sinned against than sinning.” Directed by Jennifer Reeder, “My Lear” (2025) features the artist fully costumed as a mad old king, ranting and raving in his studio, overstuffed with past artwork, presumably unsold. Cue the obvious parallels with kingdoms, daughters, and hangers-on.

Tasset does this sometimes — makes wildly personal work about himself or his family. The sincerity can be staggering. Back in the late 1990s, he dressed up as Neil Young and Robert Smithson for a pair of staged photographs, confessing style and aspiration. “My Lear” feels of a piece, though decades braver and crazier.

