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Tony Tasset cuts to the bone

The artist's first show at Corbett vs. Dempsey is no facile victory lap.

By Bianca Bova | May 13, 2025



Installation view, “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!,” Corbett vs. Dempsey
Credit: Robert Chase Heishman

Tony Tasset’s latest solo exhibition, “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!” now on view at Corbett vs. Dempsey, is a doubling down by an artist who has all of the assurances and all of the insecurities of a long career firmly behind him. Many in his position—major monograph published, slot set with a gallery whose roster reads like a who’s who of Chicago’s 20th-century art historical luminaries—might use the show as a victory lap. Tasset, long the faithless examiner of lowest-common-denominator American culture, knows better than to do that.

The exhibition is dominated by a suite of monochromatic paintings, varying in size, that ring the gallery. Each bears fields of intentional distress, many abraded or slashed to bare the stretchers beneath. Despite the aggressiveness of these gestures, the works have a quiet, formal dignity about them that leaves one longing for a proper retrospective of Tasset’s work. Set them in line with his Domestic Abstraction works from the 1980s and Display series from the 1990s, and see if they don’t suddenly seem the providence of one who has not worn their success especially well.

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In the center of the gallery sits Brick Barrow, a trompe-l'oeil painted bronze sculpture of a rotted-out, weathered hauling barrow. Produced with exceptional attention to detail at an unsettlingly, subtly exaggerated scale, it is an elegant, elegiac monument to usefulness outlived.



The video *My Lear* features Tasset in seemingly homemade Shakespearean regalia, reciting a monologue from *King Lear*. Credit: Robert Chase Heishman

Around the corner in the north gallery-turned-screening room is a work of even greater discomfort and immediacy: a video piece, entitled *My Lear*, produced and codirected by artist Jennifer Reeder. It features Tasset in seemingly homemade Shakespearean regalia, reciting—right there alongside Hot Dog Man and the Blob Monster in his studio—a monologue from *King Lear* (a work itself dealing in the inherent costs of self-possession, and whose third act is, of course, also from where the exhibition title derives). One has to reserve a certain degree of admiration for Tasset, and for the plain if not painful display of desperation and neediness that feels just a little too real not to be something closer to the bone than pure performance. As is the case when confronted with so many of Tasset's works, one wants reflexively to recoil, only to find that they instead remain riveted.