

# HESSE FLATOW

Naves, M. (2026, March 30). "A Master Painter Inspired by Antiquity and 'The Texas Chain Saw Massacre'". *The New York Sun*, online.



## A Master Painter Inspired by Antiquity and 'The Texas Chain Saw Massacre'

A painter inspired by both religious iconography and 1970s television and comics.



'Poise' by Nat Meade, 2026. Hesse Flatow

The painter Nat Meade, whose recent work is the subject of an exhibition at the Hesse Flatow gallery, has described the figures populating his canvases as "gods and buffoons." They are also exclusively men and boys. The press release mentions how the imagery is predicated on biographical particulars, and that the title of the show, "Franklin," is a reference to a character in Tobe Hooper's "The Texas Chain Saw Massacre" (1974).

And here I thought "Franklin" was a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the street address of Hesse Flatow's Tribeca gallery. How the character portrayed in "The Texas Chain Saw Massacre" by Paul A. Partain figures into Mr. Meade's dioramas, all of which were painted since the beginning of the year, is a bit oblique. You may recall that Franklin Hardesty was the wheelchair-bound member of a band of young folk traveling the desolate backways of the Lone Star State. His end came early and it was brutal. Where does that leave us with Mr. Meade?

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A distinct sense of anomie filters through the paintings, as does a freighted sense of time. The settings are rural in character, and the men in them, rough-hewn and solid. There's a medievalism to their physiognomies, a sense that individuality has been streamlined for the sake of symbol. Religious iconography undergirds the compositions with their intimations of transfiguration and, if not sin, burdens that seem untenable. "Sawyer" recalls the Supper at Emmaus; "Poise," the ascension.

Giotto haunts the canvases — Mr. Meade's forms have a similar heft — as does antiquity, both in terms of its characters (a recurring Zeus-like figure) and theme (one picture echoes the fate of Prometheus). One would be ill advised, however, to mistake the artist for a classicist. As with most of us, Mr. Meade grew up in a pop-saturated environment and has pointed to the influence of 1970s television and film. Comics and outsider art were also vital resources in terms of his approach to anatomical stylization.

An odd mélange of precedents, then, melded into a weirdly magnetic cosmos. Mr. Meade paints on hemp, a nubby material that waylays finickiness of definition for blunt abbreviations of form. The pictures are worked on for a matter of weeks and sometimes months, the slow accretion of oil paint resulting in surfaces of obdurate density. Mr. Meade's steady layering of tawny colors suffuses his dioramas with an uncanny sense of light and, with that, an abiding quietude.



'Send Off' by Nat Meade, 2026. Hesse Flatow

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The best of the compositions are emphatically hieratic. "Send Off" features a stock figure in Mr. Meade's image bank — a heavily bearded elder — ensconced in a boat, floating stage left, toward his final resting place. "List" could be the response to "Send Off": A young man sails in the opposite direction, holding a torch to navigate a preternaturally calm body of water. Here, one feels, are elegies that bookend the mortal coil.

"Poise" posits the gulf between the heavens and the earth as if imagined by Mad magazine. The title figure in "Valley of the Mound Hound" could be distant kin of the monsters generated by Goya's sleep of reason. The worry about Mr. Meade's vision is common to a lot of contemporary art: How can an iconography of almost impenetrable density hope to accrue lucidity within a surfeit of competing realities? By force of vision achieved through a hard-won command of the medium employed.

Mr. Meade is a master of his craft. Here is a painter of rare and quizzical eloquence.