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Galleries—Downtown: Tom Thayer

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By Johanna Fateman

In the winningly titled exhibition “Make a Pinch Pot Out of Your Mouth,” this New Jersey-based master of the lo-fi profound, also admired for his eccentric, heartfelt music and animations, exhibits a new series of paintings—assemblages, really, made of oil, acrylic, ink, graphite, thread, burlap, aluminum, wood, string, and wire. They could easily double as puppet-show backdrops: three-dimensional figures hang on the walls and are affixed to the canvases’ gummy surfaces. Slapdash production values rule (roughly cut corrugated-cardboard shapes and scraps of canvas are go-to elements in these small compositions), but the apparent disarray belies the precision of Thayer’s allegories. The spectral work “Carefully Into One’s Mind” captures states of rumination with the image of a skull wearing an Elizabethan collar; it’s elucidated by a diaristic text that reads, in part, “I looked like a tablecloth of snowflakes as I moved across the mysterious heavens of my empty head.” The paranoid inferno of “The Sun Can Read Your Mind,” featuring a dangling yellow marionette, comes with a warning: “this cosmic furnace has an interest in punishing you, so keep your mind still and empty.” (*Derek Eller; Through Oct. 6.*)