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Where is the line between reality and our perception? That is the question Anthony Mastromatteo poses to those who view his works. As did the trompe l'oeil masters that came before him, Mastromatteo forces us to examine what exactly it is we are looking at... Magritte may frame it in the likes of "Is this a pipe, or merely an image of a pipe?" Perhaps we take it one step further and simply state we are looking at paint on a canvas, though arranged in such a way that it invokes a thought.

In the plainest of ways, Mastromatteo wants his viewers to know they are looking at paint. His supersized trompe l'oeil renderings of comics taped to stark yet vibrant backdrops are so meticulously developed, at first glance you may think you're looking at an old paper comic taped to a panel. Mastromatteo plays with our perception by selectively employing the use of heavy-handed brushstrokes to expose his illusion; a technique that permeates his work regardless of subject or scale.

Conversely, in the most complex of ways, Mastromatteo implores viewers to realize they are looking at something so much more than paint on a canvas or letters on a page... we are observing ideas. Mastromatteo's works, both written word and visual, convey thoughtful and reasoned messages, from the most mundane to the most extraordinary. Take for instance his word/image work Advent, which features the words "wait" and "weight" while pairing them alongside an image of a pocket-watch supported by the watch's hands. While the term advent traditionally refers to a time of waiting in the weeks leading up to Christmas, we can simply understand this as waiting for something important. Mastromatteo cleverly juxtaposes the words to signify the weight of waiting for the right moments in life, and the pressure that comes along with being ready for those moments, while visually depicting the "weight" of time.



Meaning runs deep throughout Mastromatteo's entire body of work; one could even make the argument he's a modern-day philosopher. His painting, *A City Upon a Hill*, prominently features Superman flying before the New York skyline. As Mastromatteo puts it, "the image brought to mind a sermon by John Winthrop near the beginning of the Massachusetts Bay Colony 'how this new land would represent a beacon... a shining city upon a hill... extolling all the liberties not found in the Old World they had just left.'" The 1970s reference used for the work notably, and obviously, features a historical New York skyline in the distance, conjuring a very peculiar feeling. On one hand, we have an iconic Superhero representing Truth, Justice, and the American Way; particularly an immigrant who in many ways symbolizes hope. At the same time, the twin towers, still present in the image, evoke this sense of extreme vulnerability and signify a turning point in American culture, particularly how we view immigrants. The sentiment of the image is not the sentiment of our time; it forces us to consider how the world we live in has changed and if the ideals this country was founded on still are present in our society today.

Whether a comic, a poem or simply the tip of a pencil, Anthony Mastromatteo challenges us to truly understand what we are looking at. Perhaps it is just some paint on a canvas, and it could just be a pipe, but maybe, just maybe it is something more than that.

A diverse collection of works by Anthony Mastromatteo will be on view at Rehs Contemporary from December 16th, 2019 through January 15th, 2020.

