

The New York Times

Josephine Halvorson

'What Looks Back'

*Sikkema Jenkins & Company
530 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through Dec. 4*

In a show that's more than twice the size of her 2009 solo at Monya Rowe, Ms. Halvorson unpacks her rugged, deeply gratifying realism. Subject choices that seemed arbitrary in the smaller exhibition look more coherent here, part of a programmatic redemption of surfaces marginalized, forgotten or so ordinary as to seem invisible.

A steam valve, a generator, an empty set of metal sign holders — all of these grim, sooty, neglected surfaces are given the oil-painting treatment. Each one is carefully observed and rendered on site, its flaws catalogued, its function (or sometimes, malfunction) acknowledged. No rivet or seam escapes notice, though Ms. Halvorson's slightly bleary brushwork makes clear that authenticity, not illusionistic fidelity, is the point.

And though these objects may seem hard, cold and impenetrable, she is able to coax from them some moments of intense pleasure. Witness the Mardenesque grays in "Cracked Back" and "Tregardock," or the raw, Soutine-like rib cage of "Carcass" (one of the few nonmechanical images in the exhibition).

One might see Ms. Halvorson as a gifted salvager, rummaging through the odds and ends of American experience and finding plenty that's suitable — even desirable — for painting.

KAREN ROSENBERG