

# The New York Times

© 2009 The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2009

## Josephine Halvorson

Clockwise From Window

Monya Rowe Gallery  
504 West 22nd Street,  
Chelsea  
Through Jan. 16

Josephine Halvorson's small realist paintings seem to have it both ways. They neither function as windows on an illusionistic world, nor do they foster the absolute agreement of flat image and flat surface basic to, say, a Jasper Johns flag or target. Instead, Ms. Halvorson's works — usually painted from one sitting — hold steady in the middle with closely cropped, relaxed renderings of shallow, boxed-off volumes and forms that are forthright but not so simple.

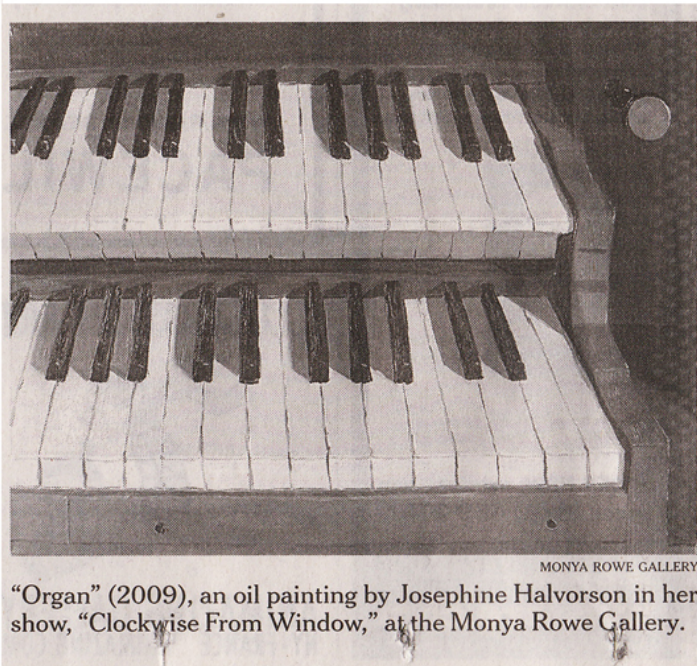
Her images and canvases almost agree in the way that her colors frequently approach monochrome — but never absolutely. They husband identifiable details, illusionistic space, tonal contrasts and, especially, the effects of real light and shadow. Still, her depictions of a paneled door, a decaying tombstone, the side of a wood-burning stove and a segment of an organ's double-decker keyboard are essentially modernist monochromes of everyday life. To complicate mat-

ters, it is the everyday life of a particular premodern American sort — noticeably old and tweaked by titles that add further vibrations.

Ms. Halvorson's idea of a white-on-white abstraction is a close-up of an old-fashioned white dress. It is titled "Concrete Chest," which can make words like sculpture, confirmation, puberty, mass production and maybe lawn ornament buzz through your mind in confusion. The implicitly deconstructive "Coral" is nothing but the parched skeleton of a bush displayed in a box. The title refers to the box's painted interior while the branches of the bush suggest the natural form of a branch of coral.

The plain and empty "Shaker Shelf" is like a frontier Donald Judd box. Seen at a slight angle, its edges are subtly off-square with those of the canvas; its interior is bisected by shadows that complicate its geometries and basic browns.

Ms. Halvorson's art adds, as yet infinitesimally but credibly, to visions of late Manet, Morandi and William Nicholson, all of whom enlivened pure painting with reality. **ROBERTA SMITH**



MONYA ROWE GALLERY

"Organ" (2009), an oil painting by Josephine Halvorson in her show, "Clockwise From Window," at the Monya Rowe Gallery.