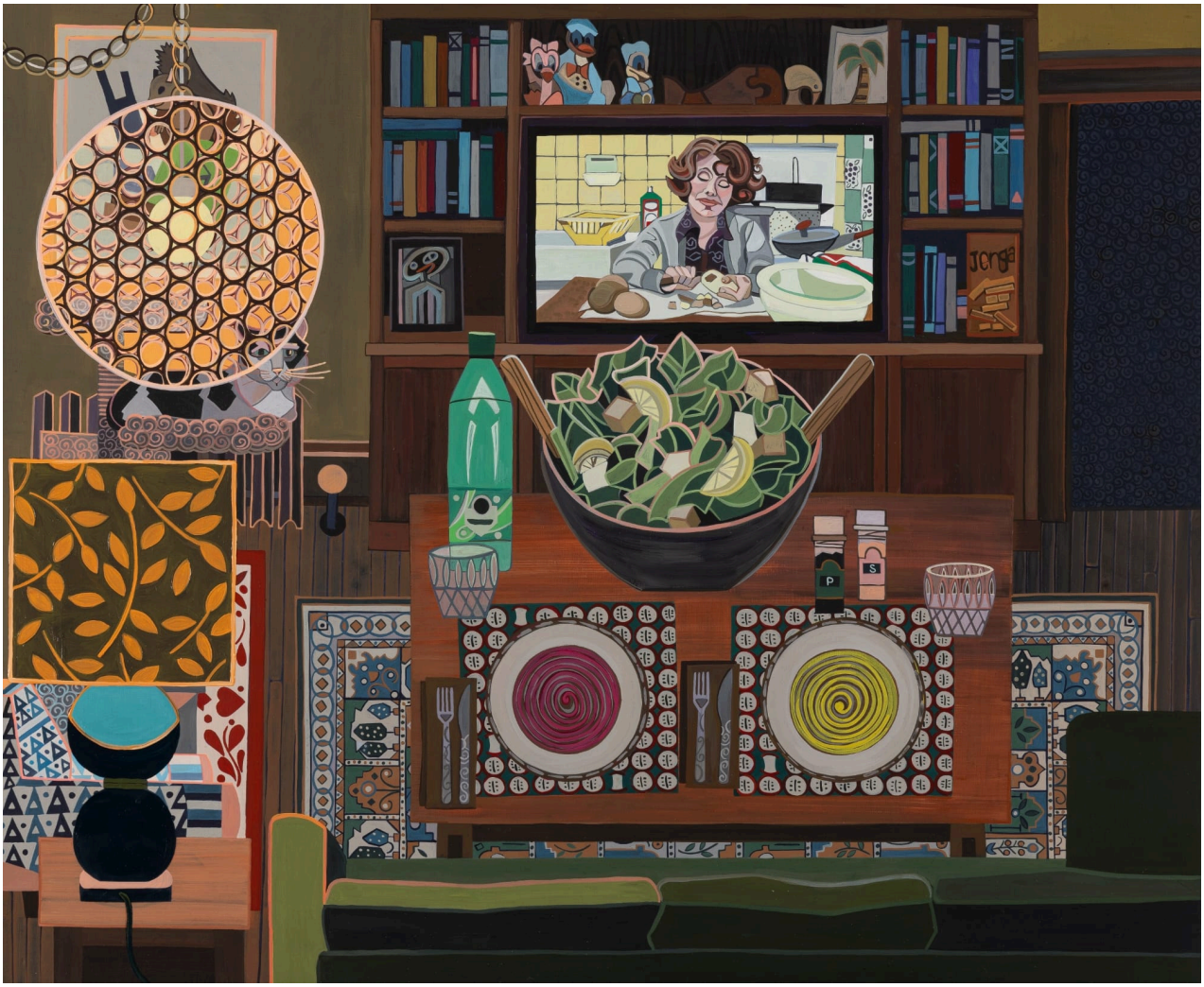
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"Jeanne Dielman" (2024), gouache and oil on panel, 20 x 22 inches. All images courtesy of Ann Toebbe, shared with permission

Ann Toebbe's Skewed Paintings Transform Architectural Spaces into Cherished Places

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Grace Ebert

"I find that when I work from my emotions and experiences, I make a more powerful image," Ann Toebbe writes. Meditating on the connection between physical spaces and the feelings and memories bound within them is central to the Chicago artist's practice.

In a review of Toebbe's recent exhibition at Hyde Park Art Center, the writer Elisa Shoenberger teases out the distinction that grounds the artist's work. "Space is the physical location, while place is the meaning we bring to it. It's the difference between thinking about the physical location of your house (space) and the feelings, history and emotions tied up in your home (place)," Schoenberger writes. Rendering interiors and cross-cut buildings in impeccable detail, Toebbe concentrates on a particular sensation or mood and then constructs a series of architectural compositions that extrapolate on the theme.



"The Farm (Spring)" (2023), oil and gouache on panel, 35 x 35 inches

Preliminary sketches and more elaborate drawings scaffold what becomes the final work on panel, which typically incorporates a mix of gouache, oil paint, paper collage, and colored pencil. Reference photos have their role, too, although each piece emerges with a manipulated layout and the artist's signature skewed perspectives.

"I might extend a wall or include indoor and outdoor elements to make a layout snap together. I am always messing with how baseboards can divide and connect walls and floors. I might stack a composition or unfold it like a flattened box," she says. "I love creating transitions with flow, and I try to avoid abrupt cropping."

Toebbe's stylized interiors typically mix reverse and parallel perspective, the former enlarging objects as they move farther away and the latter keeping objects the same size. This inventive approach plunges the viewer into an uncanny world in which the artist's predilection toward pattern and texture reigns. "I like to change up working methods to give myself a new formal puzzle to solve," she adds. "I usually have an idea of the materials I want to work with at the start, but everything is up for grabs as I work."

If you're in Chicago, you can see some of Toebbe's works in a group exhibition on view through October 31 at Andrew Rafacz. Otherwise, find more from the artist on Instagram. ◆



"Overgrowth" (2026), oil and gouache on panel, 35 x 35 inches



“Northside Southside” (2023), colored pencil and pencil on paper, 35 x 35 inches



“Toys et Cetera” (2026), 20 x 22 inches



“Family Room (Sister)” (2017), gouache on panel, 22 x 18 inches



“Crooked Lampshade”



“Hardwood Floors” (2020), gouache and paper collage on panel, 35 x 35 inches