

# COLOSSAL



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“Moreau/Detrick Reliquary” (2024), walnut, paper pulp, plaster, foam, faux fur, found objects, acrylic, and oil on panel, 40.25 x 31 x 13 inches. All images courtesy of Andrew Rafacz, shared with permission





## Josh Dihle Toys with Reality in His Topographic Paintings Akin to Fever Dreams

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Art

Grace Ebert

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“The model railroader is the truest creator: engineer, architect, and master of his own timetable,” reads a statement about [Josh Dihle’s](#) feverish exhibition, *Basement Arrangement*.

Armed with hundreds of minuscule objects from coral to LEGO, Dihle concocts dreamlike worlds in which figures become topographies and every cavity houses a surprising detail. Peek inside the cheek of “Moreau/Detrick Reliquary,” and find a woolly mammoth with lustrous stones embedded in its wooden tusks. “Confluence” is similar as carved fish jut out of the foam-and-plaster ground alongside trees and palms with widespread fingers.

Evoking model railroads and dollhouses, Dihle’s sculptural paintings incorporate recognizable objects but with an uncanny, if not skewed, perspective. Stretching nearly five feet tall, the large-scale works hang on the wall and draw a contrast between the overall composition, viewed straight on, and the miniature vignettes best taken in at a 90-degree angle. Step back and see an aerial landscape with hills shaped like lips or a sunken nose, while close-up inspection becomes a dizzying hunt for unlikely items tucked into every crevice.

The exhibition title originates with hermit hobbyists, who seem to come alive when cloistered in worlds of their own making. What appears to outsiders as an escape from reality is, for them, an attempt to organize the chaos and take control, even if in the form of toys and make-believe.

If you’re in Chicago, see *Basement Arrangement* at [Andrew Rafacz](#) through July 18. Find more from Dihle on his website. ♦



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Detail of "Confluence" (2025), oil, acrylic, colored pencil, resin, fossils, rocks, LEGO, marbles, beach glass, plastic toys, coral, paper pulp, plaster gauze, foam, cherry, and carved walnut on panel, 57 x 45 x 19 inches





Detail of "Confluence" (2025), oil, acrylic, colored pencil, resin, fossils, rocks, LEGO, marbles, beach glass, plastic toys, coral, paper pulp, plaster gauze, foam, cherry, and carved walnut on panel, 57 x 45 x 19 inches



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“Moreau/Detrick Reliquary” (2024), walnut, paper pulp, plaster, foam, faux fur, found objects, acrylic, and oil on panel, 40.25 x 31 x 13 inches





Detail of "Moreau/Detrick Reliquary" (2024), walnut, paper pulp, plaster, foam, faux fur, found objects, acrylic, and oil on panel, 40.25 x 31 x 13 inches



"Brittle Star" (2025), oil, acrylic, casein, colored pencil, Legos, fossils, rocks, plastic toys, marbles, mosaic tile, buttons, carved walnut, paper pulp, plaster gauze, foam, and plywood on panel, 47 x 21 inches





"Confluence" (2025), oil, acrylic, colored pencil, resin, fossils, rocks, LEGO, marbles, beach glass, plastic toys, coral, paper pulp, plaster gauze, foam, cherry, and carved walnut on panel, 57 x 45 x 19 inches





“Sighting” (2025), casein, colored pencil, rocks, fossils, eyeball agate, agate, amber, found objects, plastic toys, mosaic tile, marbles, LEGO, beads, thumb tacks, and beach glass on carved basswood, 18 x 14 x 1.5 inches





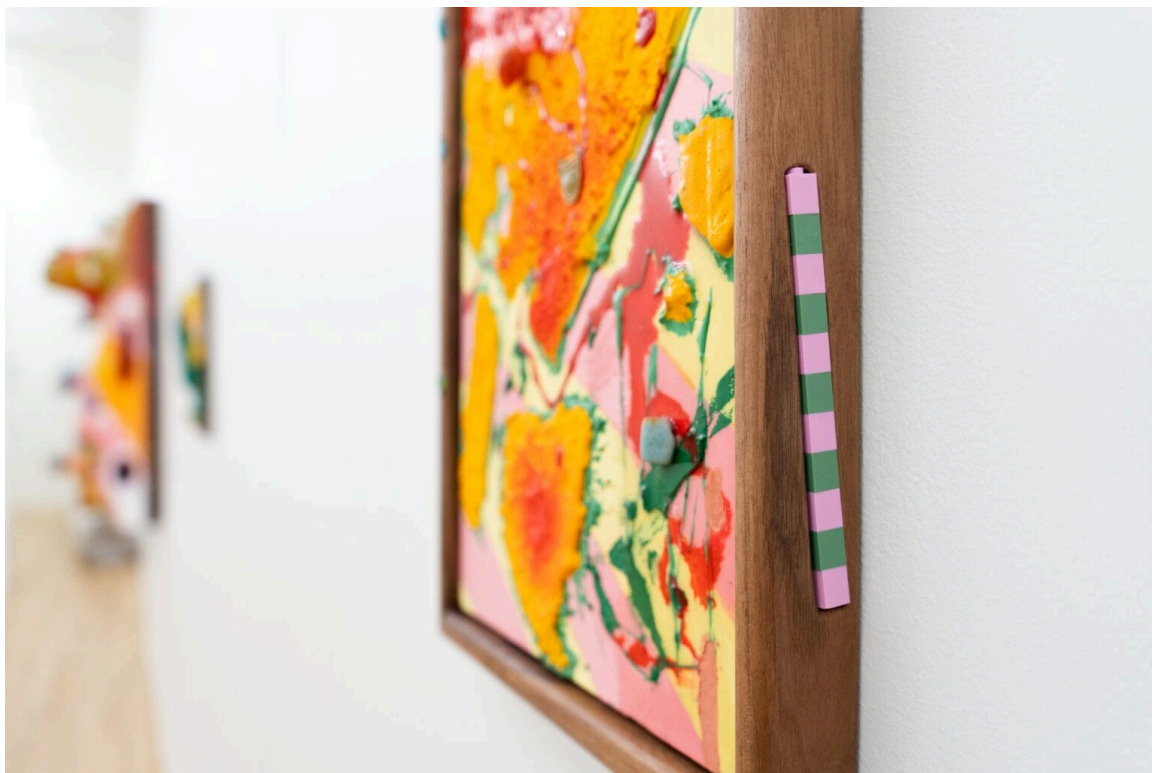
"Falls" (2025), acrylic, turquoise, meteorite, fossil, marble, rocks, plastic toy, paper pulp, plaster gauze, twine, maple, and foam on panel, 42 x 32.5 x 11 inches



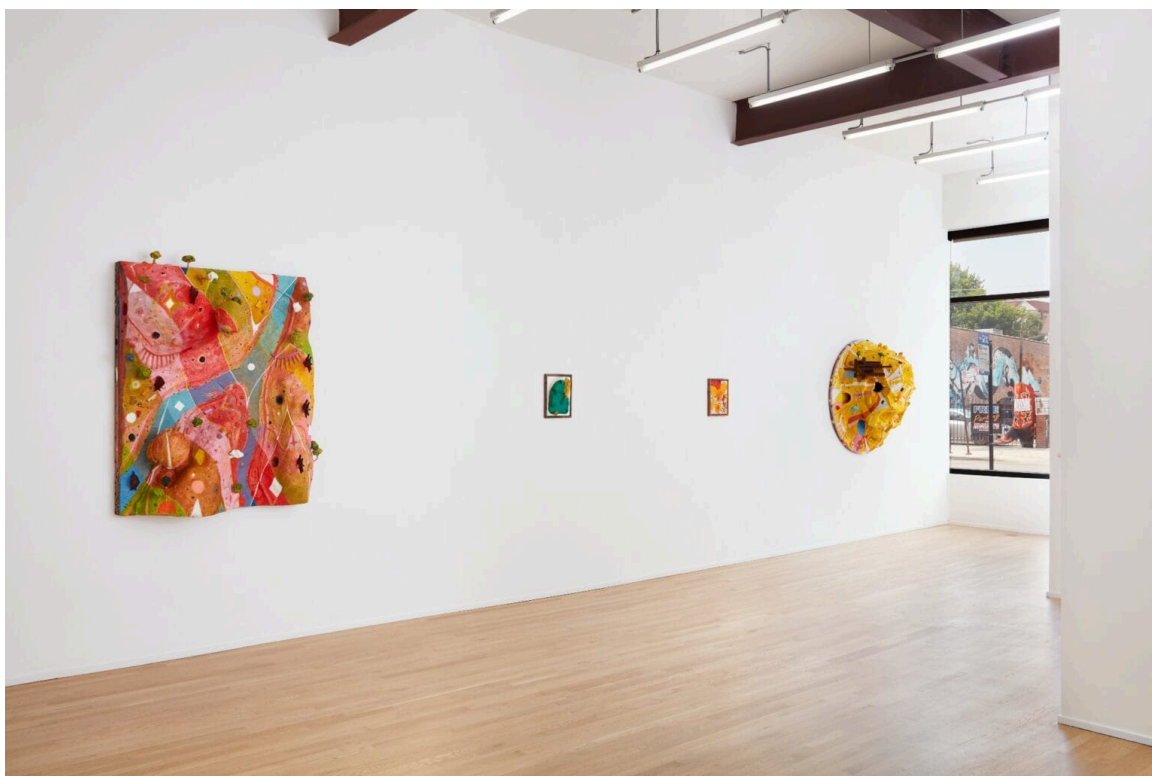


"Radon" (2025), casein, acrylic, resin, turquoise, rocks, LEGO, found jewelry, plastic Micro Machine, fossil, beach glass, and walnut on panel, 13.25 x 10.25 x 1.25 inches





Detail of "Radon" (2025), casein, acrylic, resin, turquoise, rocks, LEGO, found jewelry, plastic Micro Machine, fossil, beach glass, and walnut on panel, 13.25 x 10.25 x 1.25 inches



Installation view of 'Basement Arrangement'