

The Interpretation of Sunbeams: A Review of Josh Dihle at Andrew Rafacz Gallery

BY CHARLES VENKATESH YOUNG | JUNE 25, 2025



Josh Dihle, installation view of "Basement Arrangement," 2025, at Andrew Rafacz gallery/Photo: Andrew Rafacz gallery

Josh Dihle has the visual vernacular of an obsessive-compulsive raised on "Goodnight Moon." His work is paranoid and campy, making life-and-death dilemmas of quotidian objects while maintaining the outward

to make of the deeply personal info embedded within them?) before rendering each meaningless in the face of childlike ravishment and existential despair—take your pick, as Dihle proves they're two sides of the coin that is the human mind.

Dihle's most characteristic works in the current show at Andrew Rafacz gallery are hanging wall sculptures that appear something like paintings melting out of their frames. Their medium is evasive, a hodgepodge of paint, paper pulp and plaster ornamented by rocks, marbles, Legos and thumbtacks (among other found objects) strewn about as if by a tornado. While the use of found household items has become something of a heavy-handed trend among young contemporary artists—BFA showcases appear especially vulnerable to retaining the clutter but not the intimacy of an untidy living room—Dihle goes about the task with remarkable deftness. Each of his additions is a necessary part of his aesthetic equation, holding play and psychosis in tenuous balance: underlying the ludic value of each item is the sense that they form some inscrutable web of Dihle's inner life, constituting his jumbled psychic portrait. (This paranoid everything-relates-to-everything-else mentality isn't sheer neurosis on the viewer's part, as Dihle's household curios can get uncomfortably private—one dog tag is outfitted with his full name and what looks to be his mobile phone number. With this degree of closeness, it's not unreasonable to think he's letting us in on some conspiracy.)



Josh Dihle, "Sump," 2025, oil, acrylic, rocks, plaster gauze, papier mache, and walnut on panel, 13.25" x 10.25" x 2.75" /Photo: Andrew Rafacz gallery

While Dihle clearly owes something of his phantasmagoric pitch to the surrealists, his work inhabits a different physical and psychic landscape

subject matter is palpably real (commonplace, at that), yet the reality it inhabits was never coherent in the first place.

Chief among its incoherences is the pareidolic fantasy lurking throughout Dihle's oeuvres: his landscapes—whether topographic or painterly, sculpted or drawn—inevitably find their component parts yielding to the form of a pasty human visage (something like Han Solo frozen in carbonite). This constant identification of the anthropoid self with nature, so pathologized as “narcissism” or “schizophrenia” by Dihle's unconscious-obsessed forerunners, is plainly childlike in his rendering—after all, how can we expect these newly-conscious beings to see the external world as anything other than an outgrowth of the self? That this innocent solipsism comes to be regarded as a damnable neurosis in adults seems almost random, a logical perversion. We contain multitudes, Dihle reasons, and it is not neurotic in the slightest to let our myriad selves spill, foamy and exultant, into the unknowable world around us.

“Josh Dihle: Basement Arrangement” is on view at Andrew Rafacz gallery, 1749 West Chicago, through July 19.
