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LESLIE WAYNE: *WHAT'S INSIDE*

By Mimi Wong

In the painting *Everything*, 2019, by Leslie Wayne (NA 2016), a set of white, wooden doors hinges outward. A piece of rope looped and knotted through a pair of metal handles seems to be the only measure keeping the contents from bursting through the foot-wide opening. Behind the double doors, blotches of color dissolve into a pillowy heap that resembles ribbons of fabric, rather than the oil paint scrapings the artist used. The doors, too, prove to be an optical illusion—painted onto a flat surface, but enhanced with actual materials. Viewed from afar, the work does not easily betray what's real and what's not.



Leslie Wayne, *Everything*, 2019, oil, metal, and rope on wood, 81 x 45 ¼ x 5 ½ in., image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

For her solo exhibition *What's Inside* at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City, on view now through March 30, Wayne continues to settle into a form of dimensional painting that she's developed over the course of two decades. The German-born artist previously used the technique of layering oil paint to mimic geological landscapes—as evident in earlier works such as *Before the Quake*, 2006, and *Marianas*, 2009—which harken back to her time growing up in Southern California. Rich in pigment and texture, the works also draw upon her training in *plein air* painting and sculpture. The sculptural aspect of her practice further evolved with the series *Paint/Rag*, 2013, in which she manipulated oil paint to create the illusion of hanging cloth.

Wayne's combination of abstraction and trompe l'oeil reaches its full realization in *What's Inside*. In *Heirloom*, 2017, wood panels constructed and painted to resemble a weathered armoire provide both canvas and frame for the belongings inside. Here, her knack for transforming paint in a way that mirrors textiles finds a context: sheets of acrylic are draped over the armoire door and sit folded on the shelf. A crumpled fragment imitates paper haphazardly stored in a partially-opened box. As with *Everything*, the plainness of the container contrasts with the volume of "stuff" and the state of disorder revealed inside.



Leslie Wayne, Installation view of *Heirloom*, 2017, oil and acrylic on panel, 71 ½ x 48 x 7 ½ in., image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

A commonality among all the works may very well be this shared feeling of something askew or not quite right. First cropping up in Wayne's previous exhibition, *Free Experience*, 2017, windows serve as another recurring motif. The impulse behind them was similar to the idea of the threshold seen in her depiction of a doorjamb or closet. "You're on one side looking to the other side," Wayne says, "and there are some things you can see, and some things that you can't see." Many of the windows included in *What's Inside* are either broken or boarded up. In *Shattered*, 2018, curtains molded from acrylic appear to flutter in the aftermath of the window's destruction. Strips of paint pressed together and cut into shapes form shards of glass, and even the window frame itself. Wayne says she was inspired by a building caught in the blast of a meteorite crashing into the Earth. "There were photos all over the internet of windows that had exploded, and I saw this one image—just graphically, it was an incredible image," she explains.



Leslie Wayne, *A Life*, 2018, oil and acrylic on wood, 89 x 45 x 3 3/8 in., image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

For the most part, the works depict intimate spaces. *A Life*, 2018, replicates a shelving unit found in Wayne's studio. Given its height, she photographed the shelf in sections, then digitally stitched the images together, and based the painting on that. Hence the looming perspective and slightly crooked angle. Boxes of paint sit at the bottom-most level. As the viewer's eyes roam upward, they find books, music, more art supplies, as well as pictures of close friends. In many respects, the work functions as a snapshot of an individual's life. Other furniture and storage spaces hold objects that are less literal. Patterned swaths of acrylic spill out of drawers in *Tool Chest*, 2018.



Leslie Wayne, detail of *Tool Chest*, 2018, oil and acrylic on wood, 86 x 42 x 5 in., image courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Globs of white and other assortments of paint threaten to burst forth like a hoarder's secret from behind the closet door of the exhibition's titular work, *What's Inside*, 2018. Wayne opens up about her emotional state as she was making the piece: "I had a rough year last year. It was hard. My mom died. I was just feeling really overwhelmed, and this painting, for me, is feeling like I can't keep it all contained." The ambiguity surrounding what's been hidden or stored away reinforces the sense that the artist has invited us into her chaotic subconscious. Residual pencil markings and measurements left on the panels lay bare the creative process. Even the oil paint scrapings themselves, leftover and collected from years of work, can be regarded as a physical manifestation of Wayne's long-running career. From the works' formal conceits, to their showcasing of an approach that's very much her own, *What's Inside* represents a decidedly personal culmination of the artist's practice.



Leslie Wayne, *What's Inside*, 2018, oil on wood, 84 ¼ x 41 x 3 ¾ in.

What's Inside is presented at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, NY, February 22 – March 30, 2019.