

Kate Hargrave, *The Journal*
Moss Galleries, January 2025

One of the gifts that representational painting offers its viewers is the illusion of recessive depth, a celebration of the power of sight. Argued about in Western art from the Renaissance debate tradition of the *paragone*, to 1940 (when Clement Greenberg first railed against it), to present-day questions of process, illusionistic depth has long energized painters. Embracing, scrambling, or rejecting pictorial depth allows a painter to define their practice directly through its relationship to vision. But what happens when a figurative painting becomes the container of depth that is not just pictorial but actual, albeit only a few millimeters deep? The painting is, after all, a dimensional object, and as such the film of the paint has its own history of definition, effacement, erasure, and augmentation. In these buried layers, sight's illumination gives way to the understanding that it will one day be replaced by darkness.

In Kate Hargrave's 2025 solo exhibition *The Journal*, at Moss Galleries Portland, the histories of the nine paintings on view are rich with the depth of change. Obscured beneath the final, visible layers of paint, roiling and contentious stories bloom and fade between characters who now exist only as forgotten ancestors and ghostly doubles of the figures we witness in the finished work. Never at rest in a simple illusion of depth, Hargrave's paintings embody the history of the palimpsest, with multiple physical underlayers hidden from view but always informing the vision of reality that we are left with. This occultation of narrative—figures buried in action like the inhabitants of Pompeii—gives Hargrave's work a sensibility of ghostliness. Her material process is echoed in the content of the paintings' stories. Attenuated figures, often young girls, act out atavistic tableaux that embrace the proximity of mortal danger and sexuality, inhabiting an experience of life that is inseparably linked to the afterlife. The women in these paintings channel those that came before them, scratched out or buried in an underworld of painted layers.

Sometimes partially effaced as *pentimenti*, sometimes richly rendered and glowing like will-o'-the-wisps, Hargrave's nimble figures, vibrant with energy, fight to retain primacy in the compositions' dark, jewel-like chambers. The smoky veils of paint that Hargrave uses to conceal her lost figures are as important as the triumphantly visible creatures we finally encounter. These concealing layers, through the process of introducing a vertical depth of surface like a stack of gossamer shrouds, allow her paintings to not only transcend historical conversations around the function of image and story, but to pass through the veil that separates the world of the living from the realm of the dead.

— Hilary Irons, 2025