

Artist Statement

Kelly Olshan

Olshan's work investigates the relationship between the art-making process and ambition. Her three-dimensional paintings present abstract landscapes, utilizing a distinct visual vocabulary to create an unattainable place: namely, architectural references such as staircases, the color blue, and recycled art materials such as paint scraps. Collectively, these elements work together to create idealized spaces that are appealing yet inaccessible.

Drawing upon architecture's symbolic connotations, abstracted staircases direct the viewer skywards. Often disjointed and spatially incongruous, these staircases would be almost impossible to climb. Yet their allure invites climbing anyway, as they are painted in rich hues and textures. They serve as the sole means to access the elusive blue-space, which is reminiscent of sky-scapes, waterscapes and the horizon at a distance. Placed towards the top of the composition, these spaces are both physically and metaphorically out of reach.

As art historian Rebecca Solnit wrote, blue is "the color of longing for the distances you never arrive in," a place "where you are not and where you can never go." In her work, blue represents ambition's unachievable goal. Just as the blue-space ceases to be blue upon arrival, to perpetually pursue is to immediately replace one goal with another upon its accomplishment.

As another integral part of her practice, Olshan collects and repurposes leftover materials from the art-making process. This "artistic waste" includes dried oil paint, including thick, goopy balls of paint and film-like textures as well as graphite pencil shavings, used masking tape, and other found objects such as paint tubes and used paper palettes. Unlike more traditional artistic mediums, artistic waste cannot be purchased or manufactured; it must be generated from past creation. These materials serve as artifacts of the creative process, telling the visual story of artistic pursuit.