

Eleven Rivington 11 Rivington St New York NY 10002 USA  
212-982-1930 gallery@elevenrivington.com

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ART IN REVIEW: JERONIMO ELESPE

By Ken Johnson

Audiello Fine Arts  
526 West 26th Street  
Chelsea  
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With charming modesty and a deft touch, Jeronimo Elespe plays on and off the modernist picture plane. In each painting by this young Spanish-born artist, a small, ordinary object is rendered in a loose but realistic style on a broad gray surface. While invoking monochromatic abstraction, the thin, flat surface reads variously.

It works as, for example, a wall to which may be attached a row of toilet paper dispensers or a couple of calendar pages. In other instances, as in the image of a face-off between a pair of tortoise-shell glasses and a pair of sunglasses or that of some plastic slide boxes, the illusory plane tips away from the picture plane toward the horizontal and the objects exist at a distance, isolated.

In the image of a single, metal handle, the picture plane has a Jasper Johns-esque ambiguity: does the handle attach to a drawer or is it used metaphysically, to tug open the painting itself? Curiously, despite his playful manipulations of the actual and the illusory, the mood of Mr. Elespe's paintings is poetically subdued, as though he were saddened by the existential implications of his investigations.