

TEMLON



JIM DINE

THE BROOKLYN RAIL, June 2023

Jim Dine: *Three Ships*

By [Alex Grimley](#)



Installation view: Jim Dine: *Three Ships*, Templon, New York, 2023. Courtesy the artist and TEMPLON, Paris — Brussels — New York. Photo: Charles Roussel.

“I lived with them,” Jim Dine says of his ruggedly executed self-portraits in pencil. It’s a statement he returns to, first when detailing the years-long process behind the construction of the three massive bronzes that comprise *Three Ships (the Magi)* (2022), and again, with regard to the over two dozen painterly self-portraits in oil, bodies of work currently on view at Templon. I

ON VIEW

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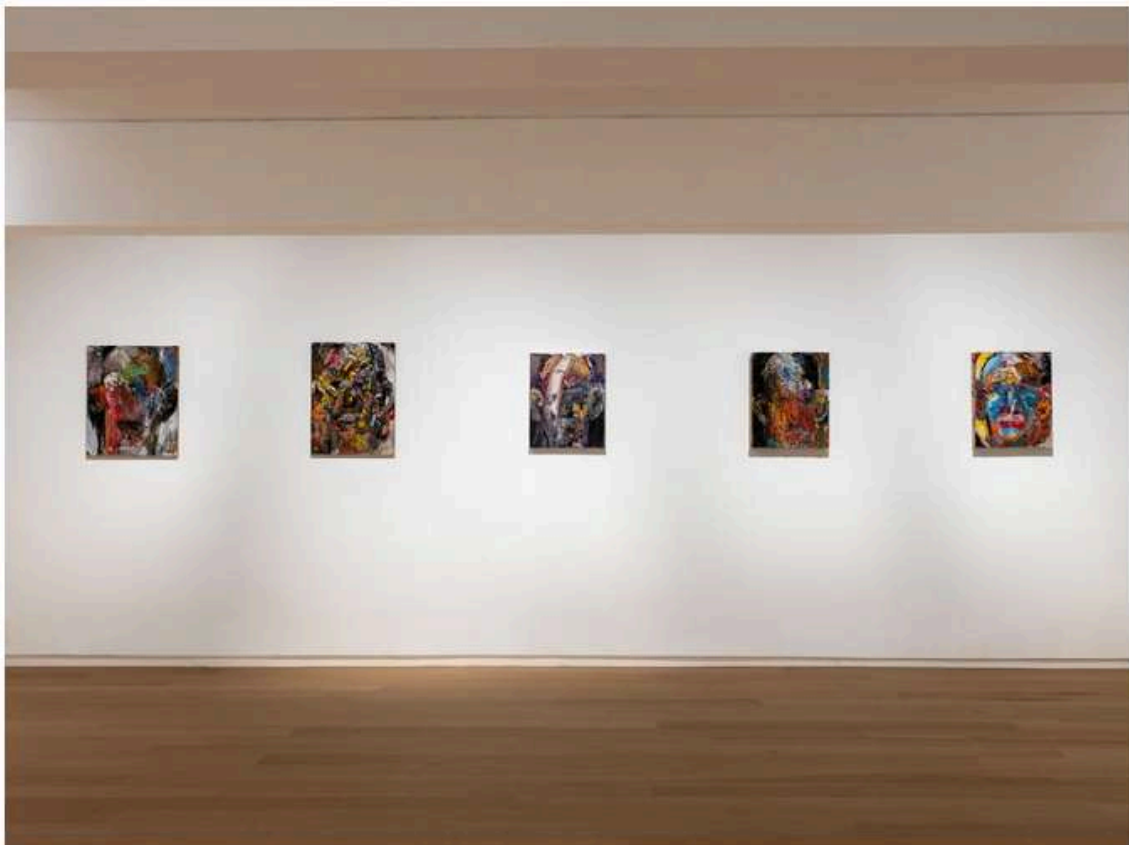
Three Ships

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happened to catch Dine the afternoon before the opening. With a smile, he advised, “Spend some time with the work.” The passage of time is a primary motif throughout Dine’s recent work: time remembered, time felt as aging, the accumulation and disintegration of material over time, and the urgency of one’s finite time on Earth.

Following the onset of the pandemic lockdown in the spring of 2020, Dine embarked on the two sets of self-portraits. Those done in pencil are the products of close and gradual observation. Sitting in front of a mirror, Dine would capture his visage, then, for weeks thereafter, continue reworking that same picture—shading, scraping, rubbing, erasing—a perpetual effort to evade permanence. These portraits work against fixity, with the abraded and disintegrated paper evidence of Dine’s reckoning with the passage of time. Tear lines and tape are visible in *Drawing the minutes G* (2020–22), for example, while in *Drawing the minutes I* (2020–22), half of Dine’s eyeglasses were subsumed at some point in the process. His continued refinement of the wrinkles around his eyes in *Drawing the minutes D* and *E* (both 2020–22) results in their virtual disappearance. To spend some time with these works, as Dine suggests, is to register the many campaigns of restless activity that produced them.



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In the pencil portraits, the artist's expression remains relatively unchanged. By contrast, Dine captures a range of emotion in his oil self-portraits. Painted from memory, the self-portrait format here functions as a pretext for the expression of moods and states of mind. Though all the paintings have a dense, impastoed surface texture in common, Dine doesn't stay wedded to any particular palette, ground, or manner of mark making. In some pictures, for example *ME #5* (2020), the artist builds his likeness with a patchwork of daubs and marks, while in others, verisimilitude seems not to be a concern at all. Figure gives way to background in the brilliantly colored *ME #23* (2023), and features are smeared and painted out in *ME #28* (2023). The tight installation and relatively small scale of the two bodies of work, facing one another in the gallery's low-ceilinged bottom floor, invites an intimate experience.

Figuration takes an altogether different form in Dine's massive abstractions, with twisting and spiraling lengths of copper tubing projecting from the painting's surface. In the expansive *Grace and Beauty* (2022), where a variety of three-dimensional media is embedded in the overall texture, these copper elements stand like figures in an urban landscape, or as an illegible scrawl upon a painterly palimpsest. Dine's process is additive: time passes, work continues, material is amassed. "I have built and rebuilt her surface and gone beyond the edges," he writes of the painting, referring, one presumes, to his eventual incorporation of panels flanking the central square canvas.

The copper that Dine uses throughout the large abstractions, with its metallic sheen and crisp linearity, even when massed and tangled, as in *Poets on the railroad* (2023), serves as a dramatic contrast to the dull, corroded appearance of the towering bronzes of *Three Ships (the Magi)* (2022). "As they grew in the first two years of their life," Dine writes in the exhibition catalogue, "they remained forms, period." During the next several years, with the addition of rusted tools encrusted in their muddied stumps, the three bronzes eventually appeared to have taken shape organically, like refuse in the woods, overtaken by nature. Clumps of clay are propped up by branches, like a makeshift shelter, but loaded with hammers and handsaws, shovels and hedge shears. Sticks lean on the construction, making its interior space inaccessible.



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Taken together, the various bodies of work in this show, his self-portraits especially, evince Dine's commitment and vitality. The self-portraits amount to a perpetual recording of the passing of time, and one senses that Dine ceased work on them reluctantly. Many are difficult, rewarding prolonged attention: the time it took to realize them—years of work, and of growth and change, telescoped into finite objects—reveals itself slowly. What is on offer in these works is time regained.