

The rest of the crowd, even the paintings, were background to them, the stud and his girl, the unbelongers. He of the neon cap and pants like Magritte's hot palette period. She of the decorated crimped hair, pulling his younger arm as he sidled away from "Golconda." Her rabbit eyes arced to mitered canvas premises where countless bowler-hatted male figures came down from the sky like rain.

"Is there some big meaning?" the boyfriend asked, "Never mind all them little hung-up dudes in black, I mean this." He pointed to "Entr'acte." The girlfriend gazed at human components, one arm and a leg forming a body--somehow logical, familiar, laughable, sad, while the sum waffled on the edge of a gasp. She tugged him to the next offerings, smiled when he pronounced a nude too fat. Then he loitered too long at a 3-part bronze female.

He cackled above the generic noise of other viewers at the self-portrait, "Clairvoyance," the artist painting a bird on canvas, an egg for a model. "Cute," the pair agreed.

They ended at "The Lovers," a man and woman kissing, faces shrouded in cloth. "That I understand," the stud said. The girl took his hand out of the rear pocket of her jeans. "How come you can figure that one?" "Easy. Just like us." He smirked. "They don't really know each other. Get it? Don'tcha get it?" She shifted her weight to her bony hip and said, "Maybe they don't want anybody to see who they're with." He frowned. "Nah. That ain't it. They make each other into some super fantasy instead o' what's real." "I don't." She twisted her fuchsia bow. "Everybody does." His arm indicated the lookers. "I don't. You're all you. I don't play like you're Brad Pitt. So what's wrong with me like I am? Love is s'posed to accept the truth." He shrugged. "I'm just tellin' ya, man. Nobody knows nobody. We're all strangers. That's life, babe."

Crumbs of dark pigment sloughed off her wet eyelashes, painted shapes smeared pale walls as she ran, space skewed like the warped red frames she passed, part of her still wondering at the oddities they combined and held together, and why.