

I came back from Italy and I couldn't shake the echo of Masaccio from my head. Walking into the Santa Maria Novella and standing before the Holy Trinity, I experienced something fundamental that had snuck in, as if through my bones: there I was, hundreds of years after the painting was made, millennia since its subject matter was conceived, serving as a perpendicular mirror for the skeleton laying prone, entombed, at the bottom of the painting. My skeleton, of course, was concealed that day by a map of arteries and neurons, pockets of fat and cotton, muscle vines, scabs, serotonin receptors, skin and whatever forces animate the creases therein.

But I knew myself in that skeleton— it was a twin I shared with every person who had stood there before. It is no wonder why heaven was constructed, why the ancient Greeks conjured Charon to ferry souls of the dead across the river Styx into the underworld, or Dante imagined the afterlife in such frighteningly meticulous detail. We need to believe there is something out there beyond our bones. We need to sew illusions like blankets to shroud us from cold, hard realities.

I was convinced, then and now, to stand there unfazed would be denouncing something inherently human.

“Bed Digging” began as a reaction to this experience. It was conceived as an altarpiece for an affair. I wanted a painting that was tomb-like, but instead of housing Masaccio's solitary, still figure, I made space for two in its shallow confines. I wanted a painting whose subjects were ostensibly safe, shrouded under a bright, cross-sectioned stratum of blanket, compressed by the frame's dimensions.

Protected as the space might seem, however, it is supported by a precarious bed frame (built with a mere suggestion of paint) and an equally meagre mattress, sagging under the weight of the cheating lovers. The narrative's initial sense of security is further jeopardized by the click of a lock at the door to the left, and visual cues in the surrounding space that suggest the ominous arrival of reality outside a carefully constructed shroud of deception.