

# Jokey paintings tease the mind

By Edward J. Sozanski  
INQUIRER ART CRITIC

**C**ary Leibowitz is either the king of self-deprecation or an adroit poseur. He feigns failure as an artist, but his solo exhibition at the Arcadia University art gallery delivers piquant social commentary disguised as cheeky humor and unconvincing self-pleading.

Leibowitz's art is grounded in three personal facts: He's Jewish, homosexual and concerned about being too heavy. His paintings and the pyramid of wastebaskets in the center of the gallery are all jokes of a kind. They seem simplistic at first, but if you turn them over in your mind, they nip at your fingers.

Consider two sets of paintings that complement each other. One pair juxtaposes a slender orange panel bearing the words *hi fatty* against a round, coffee-colored one that answers *hi*.

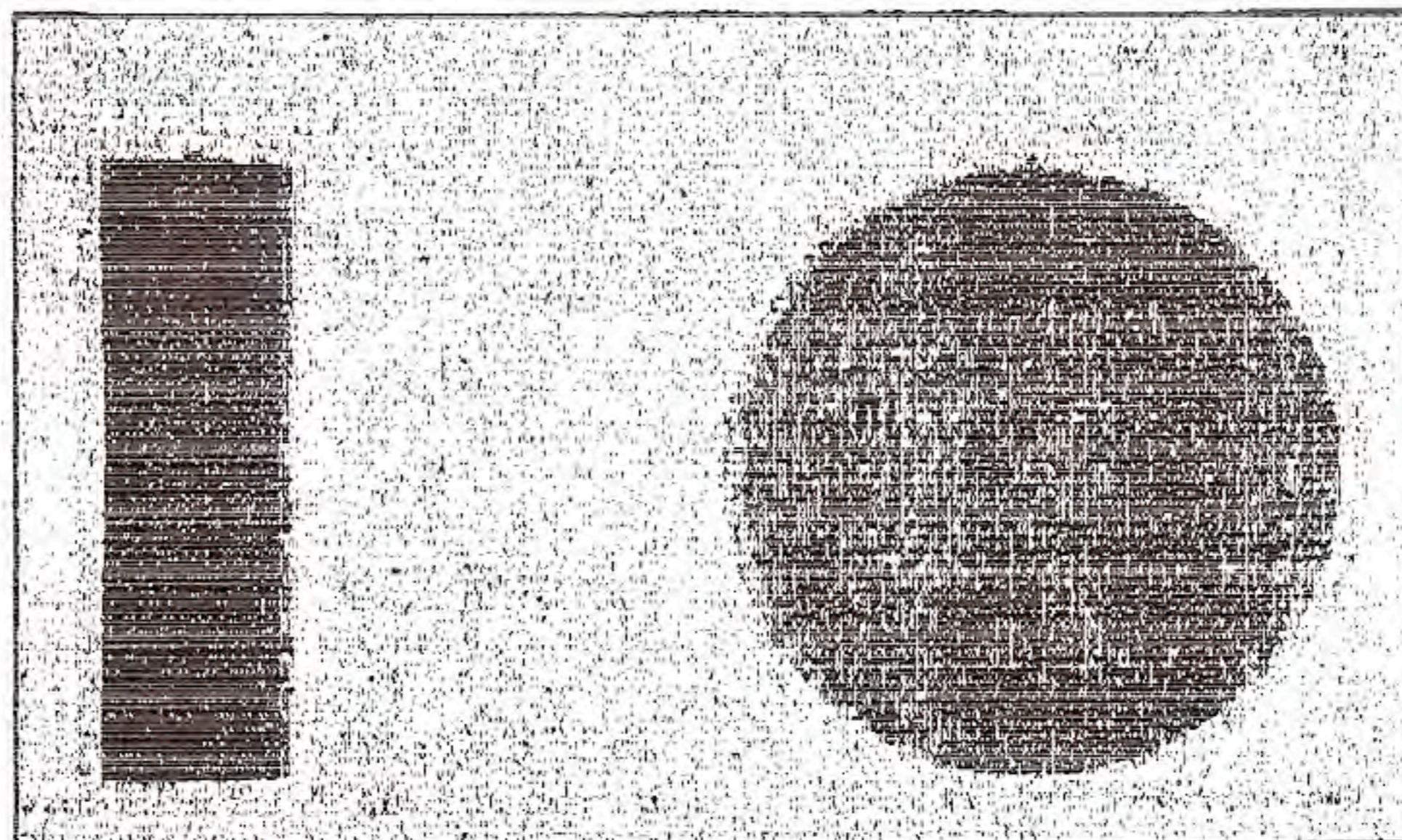
On another wall, a robin's-egg blue panel sneers *hi jewboy* to a yellow Star of David, which responds, lamely, with *hi*. They reminded me of an old Lenny Bruce routine on the subject of anti-Semitism.

A group of shaped, candy-colored paintings bear jokey titles: *Painting With Hindsight* sports a rear-view mirror. It's art-world pretension reduced to sight gags.

As for the pyramid: Leibowitz has piled up about 200 cans imprinted with his bar mitzvah picture and the legend "Gain! Wait! Now!" After a moment, the joke trails off into mild pathos.

But Leibowitz is like a Woody Allen character; he may act like a shlub, but you can't believe that he really believes he is one. However, you can believe that he enjoys puncturing social taboos and art-world cant.

Arcadia University gallery, 450 S. Easton Rd., Glenside. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Through March 14. 215-572-2131 or [www.arcadia.edu/gallery](http://www.arcadia.edu/gallery).



Cary Leibowitz, in works at Arcadia University, pokes fun at himself, as above — "hi fatty" — and below — "hi Jewboy." The responses: "hi."

