ALMINE RECH

Dustin Yellin
If a bird's nest is nature, what is a house?

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I was doomscrolling social media late one night—call it a ritual, call it a failure of will—when I landed on a TikTok clip of astrophysicist Hakeem Oluseyi chatting with Neil deGrasse Tyson and comedian Paul Mecurio. In the video, Oluseyi explains the Andromeda paradox with casual brilliance: Imagine you're sitting still in a chair and someone runs past you—at the precise moment you cross paths, you both look up at the Andromeda galaxy. Due to the relativity of simultaneity and the immense distance of Andromeda, you each perceive the galaxy as it existed on entirely different days, despite occupying nearly the same space and time. In a universe governed by Einstein's theory of special relativity, time is elastic, contingent, dependent on motion and perspective. There is no singular "now." The further you stretch across space, the more the concept begins to unravel.

As I tried to make sense of this cosmic and unsettling truth, I was reminded of Dustin Yellin's work—specifically *Politics of Eternity* (2020), a 10,000-pound work composed of seven laminated glass panels that unfold as a sweeping triptych of civilization's mythic past, industrial present, and speculative future. Structured in mirrored acts, the piece moves from an ancient ritual scene to a futuristic orbital gathering, with a central tableau depicting the relentless march of modernity across a sea of tall ships and supertankers. As with much of Yellin's practice, it resists chronology in favor of simultaneity, layering fragments of imagery and time into a fragile but vivid whole.

Yellin's latest large-scale sculpture, *The Consequential Nature of the Simultaneous* (2025)—which premieres in 'If a bird's nest is nature, what is a house?', his first solo exhibition with Almine Rech—continues and deepens this inquiry. Also structured around a mirrored narrative, the work juxtaposes a vision of alien astronauts assembling around a NASA spacecraft and a particle accelerator with a chaotic, speculative depiction of an ancient Etruscan scene. Suspended in layers of glass, these two poles suggest a continuity between ancient cosmology and scientific futurism, collapse and discovery. The sculpture reads as a time-bridge—an architectural container for converging belief systems, cultural ruins, and space-age imaginaries. It captures Yellin's signature method of embedding found materials, painted gestures, and cultural detritus into a stratified structure that invites contemplation of what it means to exist—simultaneously—across epochs.

This exhibition marks more than a return to the gallery; it signals a conceptual shift, or perhaps a rebalancing. At its core are five new glass-layered sculptures that build on Yellin's foundational practice of compressing time, memory, and myth into vertical compositions. Yellin also presents a suite of three luminous, hallucinatory paintings—signaling his re-engagement with the medium after nearly twenty years—that vacillate between extraterrestrial geological forms and dreamlike mountain ranges, rendered in ecstatic, fluorescent hues. These imagined terrains are not so much landscapes as temporal palimpsests—portals into what geologists and theorists call deep time: the vast, incomprehensible expanse of Earth's existence, theorized by James Hutton and popularized by John McPhee, that renders human chronology a flicker in the planet's long memory.

For Yellin, deep time is more than a backdrop—it's a philosophy, an ethic, a psychic framework. His work, especially in sculpture, embodies this scale: Speculative and sedimentary, it articulates what Andrew Durbin in his 2015 essay "Archive Fever" calls a "graveyard of consciousness"—archives of feeling and matter that defy temporal fixity. These works collapse linear time into stratified gestures—images that behave like fossils of thoughts yet to fully form.

Durbin also described Yellin's sculptural bodies as "micro-Internets," networks of fragment and form that visualize not only the process of their own making but also the excess of life that resists annihilation. They hum with what Jacques Derrida might call archival ghosts—images and gestures layered into fragile cohesion, spectral in their silence but pulsing with presence. These are not narrative objects. They do not explain themselves. Instead, they pose the kinds of questions that recur in Yellin's larger practice: What survives? What connects? What is the nature of presence across time?

And then there's the title: *If a bird's nest is nature, what is a house?* The question, like much in Yellin's work, is deceptively simple. A nest is made by instinct, a house by design. Yet both are precarious shelters—fragile architectures for survival. The nest may be natural, but the house—like the archive—is a container of chosen material, a structure that determines what is remembered, what is kept, what is made visible.

That tension—between instinct and intention, entropy and preservation—runs throughout Yellin's practice. His layered glass works, in which paint and found images are suspended in sheets like time held in stasis, offer a momentary stay against forgetting. Though the included paintings echo these ideas with painterly exuberance, it is the sculptures that most powerfully embody the artist's ongoing effort to refract presence through deep, collective time.

Through it all, Yellin's deep interdisciplinary fluency persists. He is not merely an artist but a builder of systems—of objects, of institutions, of communities. As the founder of Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, a multidisciplinary space for art and science, he has cultivated a living, breathing sculptural ecosystem populated by artists, scientists, musicians, historians, neighbors—the artist's own "social sculpture." Like his artworks, it is layered, porous, enmeshed.

With 'If a bird's nest is nature, what is a house?', Yellin doesn't just return—he reframes. The exhibition is a proposal for how to live in time differently, to see ourselves not at the center of history but entangled in its strata. In a moment defined by velocity and erasure, these works slow us down. They shimmer with possibility. They archive the ineffable. And if you move close enough, you might even see yourself—reflected, refracted, paused—in their layered glass and radiant fragments.

— Terence Trouillot, Senior Editor at *frieze.*