

Do you like this painting?

Oh, yes, very much.

What do you see here?

A bulbous purple shape surrounded by orange.

Is that all?

It looks to me like some kind of toy stuffed animal viewed from behind. I see its tail, its haunches and little ears... or maybe eyes.

You might see it another way.

How's that?

As a nude male torso cropped above the nipples and below the thighs.

What I see as a tail you see as a penis?

I'm not saying I see it that way, just that it can be seen that way.

It's like the duck-rabbit illusion. You can see it one way or the other but not both ways at the same time.

Yes. I feel a bit of frustration in my mind as I try to make it into something not ambiguous.

You want a thing to be this or that, not this *and* that.

Yes. If I happen on a mushroom in the woods, I want to know if it's poisonous or not. Or magic or not.

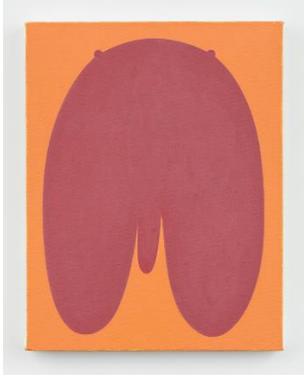
But if a mushroom guidebook told you which, would you then know everything about that mushroom?

Not if you think about all the things you *could* come to know about it.

Is it possible to know too much?

Maybe. I just now recall another Zen story:

A university professor went to visit a famous Zen master. While the master quietly served tea, the professor talked about Zen. The master poured the visitor's cup to the brim, and then kept pouring. The professor watched the overflowing cup until he could no longer restrain himself. "It's full! No more will go in!" the professor blurted. "This is you," the master replied, "How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"



Alice Tippit, "Teddy" 2016, oil on canvas, 18" x 15"