

THE-ART-FORM



YOU CREATE SOME OF YOUR PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES FROM WITHIN A VIRTUAL REALITY SPACE (USING THE OCULUS RIFT'S VIRTUAL REALITY PROGRAM MEDIUM). WHEN DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER THIS NEW WAY OF MAKING ART, AND WHAT EFFECT HAS IT HAD ON YOUR ART PRACTICE?

I started working this way about two or three years ago. It happened because my friend Rachel Rossin told me I had to and she was right. I wasn't really that interested in VR but she helped me realize that it's amazing as a tool to make things. It's had a huge impact on the work. It allows me to visualize any idea I have in digital space with light and form, before painting or making a sculpture.

DO YOU COME FROM AN ARTISTIC FAMILY? WERE YOU ENCOURAGED TO MAKE ART AS A CHILD?

No, not really. I wasn't encouraged to make art or discouraged. They kind of just let me do my own thing.

DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE AN ARTIST?

I never thought of it as a goal. It is the only way of life that felt right for me.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALISE YOU COULD MAKE A LIVING FROM BEING AN ARTIST?

Right before my second solo show. I had a day job at the time and realized that it was more practical to quit and make paintings full-time.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST ARTWORK YOU SOLD?

I don't really remember the first artwork I sold, but at the end of grad school I sold a few paintings to a collector who found my work online and it helped me move to NYC. That was probably the first or close to it.

HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN YOU ARE WORKING INSIDE THE VR SPACE FOR HOURS? IS IT A DREAMLIKE EXPERIENCE?

No I don't think it feels like a dream at all. There is a different sense of space and perspective. It feels like an infinite space. It seems like you can see forever. Dreams feel more vague and have lots of symbolic meaning. VR feels like someone can replace your input with different input and it changes your experience. It feels like it is coming from someone though.

YOUR SCULPTURES HAVE AN INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE, HIGHLY INDIVIDUAL AESTHETIC. CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE PROCESS YOU GO THROUGH WHEN CREATING A NEW SCULPTURE?

I start with a sketch or an idea. I like to simplify forms as much as possible. That might be what lends to that aesthetic. Like what's the least amount of information needed to feel a certain way.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR SCULPTURE 'MR AUSTIN'? IS IT A SELF-PORTRAIT?

When I was living in Philadelphia, I had some lovely

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neighbors. One of the kids did a drawing of me and wrote Mr. Austin on it and I always loved that drawing. The sculpture is based on a painting I made of the drawing. So it's a self-portrait through the lens of a child.

DO YOU USE A MIX OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITIONAL PAINTING METHODS WHEN MAKING A PAINTING?

Yes, I do whatever it takes to make the image. I don't really have rules about this, but I try to make images using paint anyway I can.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE OF PAINTING?

Physical renderings of digital drawings.

YOUR WORK BLURS THE LINE BETWEEN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE, DIGITAL AND ANALOG. HOW DO YOU DEFINE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE?

Painting is something that should be looked at from one perspective. Sculpture is something that should be looked at from many angles.

YOUR SCULPTURE 'HORSE WITH FLOWERS' IS HUNG FROM THE CEILING AND FLOATS IN THE GALLERY SPACE. DOES THIS REFLECT THE WAY THE SCULPTURE WAS CREATED INSIDE THE VR ENVIRONMENT? WHAT'S THE THINKING BEHIND THIS SCULPTURE?

Yes that's what I was thinking with it. Just trying to recreate the feel of the work as I had made it. When I made that sculpture I was really excited to create something that showed digital drawing strokes in space. Something that is very difficult in traditional sculpting techniques. The horse's body is made from the gesture of my hand moving. I was thinking of it like a line in space. Evidence of my movements.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES AND NARRATIVES THAT YOU EXPLORE IN YOUR WORK?

Feelings are something that I always find myself

painting. I like to try and create a work that feels like how it feels to experience something. It doesn't need to convey the something, just the feeling. I'll use my own experiences, so I know what feeling I'm trying to convey, but that openness lets the viewer connect without knowing the details.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR USE OF COLOUR? DO YOU USE A LIMITED COLOUR PALETTE?

I love color. I think it's one of my favorite parts of painting. I will happily use any color but I tend to use fluorescent colors. I imagine this is influenced by the luminosity of screen color.

DAVID HOCKNEY HAS ALWAYS EXPERIMENTED WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, ON THE 'ART FORM' YOU HAVE WRITTEN THAT HOCKNEY IS YOUR FAVOURITE ARTIST, HOW HAS HE INFLUENCED YOUR WORK?

Yes, Hockney is one of those artists where you can see his love and curiosity in the work. I think when you are excited about what you are doing, it is visible. I love how he keeps pushing into new territory not just for himself, but for everyone, decade after decade.

HOW HAS YOUR WORK EVOLVED OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS? WHERE DO YOU SEE IT GOING IN THE FUTURE?

I have recently been more excited about VR and 3D modeling. I'm really interested in creating images that



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have more believable light.

WHAT ART DO YOU HAVE AT HOME? ARE YOU A COLLECTOR?

I have a few paintings from friends that I love. A portrait of me by Louis Fratino, a small still life painting by Jordan Casteel. A horse by Ambera Wellmann, a work on paper by Nina Chanel Abney, a print by Julie Curtiss. Those are some of my favorites.

SO FAR - WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF YOUR CAREER AS AN ARTIST?

I think for me the biggest high is always when I finish a painting and it feels like something new. The lows I would rather not talk about.

HOW DO YOU KEEP MOTIVATED?

I think the best motivator is just making the work. The act of working just always propels things forward.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?

Success is growing and changing.

WHAT'S THE BEST THING SOMEBODY HAS SAID TO YOU AFTER LOOKING AT YOUR WORK?

I do not really remember what people say, but I always remember HOW they look at it. Like for me it is more in the eyes. I know if someone sees something in there. The WAY someone looks is more interesting to me. It never lies. I like it when people look at a work and you can see it's the first time they are seeing something.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A YOUNG ARTIST AT THE START OF THEIR CAREER?

The more you do what you care about, the more you end up doing what you care about. Every decision you make slowly changes your life, one way or another. It is best to try to shape it towards what you want, instead of trying to please anyone else.

