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Jack Wilson MFA Thesis 2014: Chasing The Unicorn

Jack T. Wilson

Claremont Graduate University

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Chasing the Unicorn

Philosophically I do not believe in defining oneself with sterile labels, but if pushed to categorize myself, I would say that I am painter with a strong foundation in drawing. When my work is best served by naturalistic space or photogenic representation, I also work in 3D and digital photography.

My day starts with drawing with a blunt stick of charcoal in large formats. These drawings originate without a source image. I allow the first mark to inform the second and for the composition to organically find its structure, and as such, my drawings are sometimes experiments with automation. I also draw images I discover on the internet, which tend to be single, iconographic subjects that are both personally significant to me and culturally relevant.

My style has developed out of my love for Walt Disney, Dr. Seuss, Italian Renaissance figurative paintings, Picasso and Max Beckman. As Pop art has greatly informed my work, I like to draw using bold black outlines. My perception of reality is always shifting and my mind is constantly creating structures to define concepts and my aesthetic responses to them. As I like to convey stillness and movement within a single work, the outline is both a conceptual framework and an actual frame with which I build forms. Using outlines in my paintings evolved from my drawings, but in this context they take on additional significance. The medium of paint offers color, plasticity of surface, and the ability to express qualities of illumination. Using paint adds a tension between the interior enclosed space within the outline, the outline itself, and the exterior space. With this approach, what is known and unknown can be discussed and manipulated through the spaces between the lines.

How colors respond next to each other and the space between them is much of what my paintings are about. For the past two years I have been commuting ninety plus miles a day, as such my palette has been sourced from my immediate environment. The ruby red of tail light plastics, the day-glow green traffic lights, the yellows and oranges of commercial signage, the dull asphalt greys and dirty earth tones of the road, the bright blue and crisp whites of the sky and the gentle cobalts, magentas and violets of dusk all make it into my paintings.

As with my drawing, my paintings often start without dream or desire. Similar to developing photographs in a darkroom, the works emerge into focus from a process. Starting with charcoal and progressing into acrylic, mediums and then sometimes latex and oil. I am also constantly experimenting with different techniques for application. A single painting may include mark making from brushes, trowels, sticks, brooms, spray and fingers. Because I am using the canvas to represent a complete environment for expression, the compositions tend to be confined within the boundaries of the canvas edge. My practice is serial in that I use these intuitively inspired paintings as blueprints for additional works. Using photography and editing software, I choose small sections of current pieces to sort, refine and compose new separate works. Once the structure has been finalized, I transfer the image back to the canvas.

More than anything, my art practice is about overcoming the proclivity to collude with stagnation. Somewhere in the middle of the endless pugilistic battle between consciousness and unconsciousness lies my work, positioned in between the tension of the known and the unknown. The line and the absence of it. The edge and the center. Instinctively, we surround the unknown/other with fear. When encountering a dark shape lying in my path, I automatically jump. The stick *might* be a snake. Although my survival mechanisms have built walls between the light and the dark, through my work I wish to illuminate things and spaces that were previously unknown to me. Guided by the concept of growth, my work is an emotional response to a designed reality.

For me viewing a painting is the most wonderful of experiences. It is my intent to make objects that affect the viewer enough that somewhere down the road, between the painted lines and the potholes, some aspect of that experience is memorable enough to cross their consciousness and light their way home.

Jack Wilson
CGU
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