

Ryan Wallace - hunted projects

Ryan Wallace Interview - By Steven Cox

As part of *HUNTED PROJECTS | In Dialogue* New York, It is a pleasure to present this interview and studio visit with Brooklyn based artist Ryan Wallace.

Through investigating Chardin's theory of the omega point and Kurzweil's notion of technological singularity, Ryan Wallace explores where Chardin's supreme point of complexity, consciousness and evolution is relational to Kurzweil's concept of super intelligence evolving through technological means. Perhaps this may be complicated for you if you haven't read up on either Pierre Teilhard de Chardin or Raymond Kurzweil, though Wallace's sophisticated process driven abstractions visually expand upon these concepts of evolution and technological acceleration through creating complex, heavily layered works that visually and metaphorically relate to the universal evolution of total consciousness.

Being fascinated with scientific existentialism, Wallace's Terraform series explores Chardin's Omega Point theory through creating heavily layered multi-media canvas works that visually evoke supermassive black holes. Made using oil, enamel, pigment, crystalina and cold wax, the Omega Point works are an indulgence into complexity and materiality, stimulating a sensory overload. Simultaneously, Wallace's Consensus works are additionally a play on the senses through the creation of replica rock sculptures that are displayed within tinted vitrine cases that make it difficult for the viewer to decipher which rocks are the real, or the replicant. Whilst on the other hand, Wallace's Tablet paintings mimic both the Omega Point works, and his earlier Glean series, by having the connected elements pushed to the surrounding edges of the canvas, as to allow the central void to be an area of flattened information.

A video of *HUNTED PROJECTS* studio visit with Ryan Wallace can be viewed [here](#).

To begin, can you tell HUNTED PROJECTS about yourself and creative background?

RW: Born New York, NY. Grew up mostly outside of the city in Connecticut. I went to RISD and now live and work between Brooklyn and East Hampton, New York.

When did your interest within the arts begin?

RW: Early Childhood.

At Volta this year, you exhibited your Terraform series with Cooper Cole Gallery. I found that the Omega Point paintings of yours explored the flux of visual space, through creating a fluctuating, vibrating and dynamic surface that gave an illusion of depth. Can you discuss some of the core aspects of these paintings?

RW: I'm interested in the loaded nature of that imagery and composition. I like how it grants an access point to almost any viewer. While they are essentially abstract process based paintings they have an almost narrative entry. They unavoidably reference white light as a harbinger of death or as the Big Bang of creation, black holes, gods eyes, etc. but also Ross Bleckner's light paintings, DeFeo's Rose and Bacon's voids. They are not meant to talk specifically about any of those markers but I like that they offer a suggestion or tone to the viewer that they can then take inwards. I like this open-endedness.

What are the most important aspects of these works that you hope the viewer will experience and appreciate?

RW: I specifically came to make these pictures after reading about Pierre de Chardin's theory of the Omega Point in relation to Ray Kurzweil's theoretical Singularity. Chardin was thinking about an evolutionary "oneness" while Kurzweil foresees a biological merger with machines into a networked consciousness. I am more interested in the broader implications of this type of thought and how it appears repeatedly dressed up for contemporary times. Another simple parallel can be drawn between the Tower of Babel and the Large Hadron Collider at CERN. I want the work to hint at this endless questing and the over reaching gesture of trying to grasp these big ideas. It's so human to think that we can cleanly explain consciousness or the universe as a definite equation. While both Kurzweil and Chardin's theories move towards specific, singular epochs, I present similar pictures, repeated, to subvert the absolute nature of these ideas. Here is total consciousness. Wait, no, there it is.

The surfaces of your Omega Point paintings really pull the viewer to the surface of the canvas, where the concoction of materials that include waxes and crystal dust show-

case your fetishization of alternative materials that inevitably generate an engageable surface texture. Is there a lot of material experimentation within the studio when exploring new materials, and what obstacles do you encounter along the way?

RW: while the imagery is pseudo spiritual and faux mysterious I like there to be a real sense of inquiry as to their structure. Like the haze of their “meaning” I like to muddle if you are looking at the tooth of the canvas, a Benday dot, brushwork or silkscreen. This is also a nod to historical moments from the canon of painting. Like the two opposing yet similar ideas that inspired this body of work, I want them to appear as both organic and mechanical, analog and digital. There is a lot of experimentation in the studio that is inevitably what leads to the different bodies of work that I make simultaneously. Usually, this happens by stumbling into a technique to appropriately marry with an idea and then distilling those results in the next approach. In this way a conceptual, image based picture can take shape later as a purely material exploration. The separate projects hold a physical and material evolutionary link while may be visually varied from one mode of work to the next. This is a major part of my work and time in the studio.

Lets discuss some of the technical elements within your process. It doesn't appear that you use brushes or conventional tools when applying colour...

RW: I actually frequently use brushes. But, these are made by building up layers of raw pigment, glass powder, crystalina mixed with cold wax, pulled through a vinyl screen. This is an industrial printing material that you see on the sides of buses or buildings so that you can see out from the inside but it retains the image that blocks the glass when looking in. Generally this is used for advertising. I had been making these paintings previously using a tiny brush to build up patternation with small, repeated tick marks. It was clearly the use of a brush by a human hand and referenced aboriginal painting that I thought was relevant but wanted to find a more mechanical feeling way to apply the marks. Glen Baldrige makes these installations on building facades using prints on this perforated vinyl. I discovered the material when helping him remove a piece after an exhibition. It's malleable and folds on itself, therefore irregularities are naturally created by pulling the thick wax and pigment slurry through. So it was a perfect solution to keep the analog and digital tone while appropriately removed from my hand.

Do you experience the happy accident within your process or do you feel that the form-

ing of your work is well scripted and controlled?

RW: They rely heavily on the accident. Without it they could feel like simple depictions of the dogmatic ideas that they touch on and in which I am not a subscriber. I can believe in the presence of a painting. I think the accident makes them feel of real space and time rather than a carefully designed object or decoration.

I find that preparatory sketches for paintings that feature a lot of texture is quite a difficult challenge, how do you plan your works and do you find that your initial idea is ever as comparable to what you thought out in advance?

RW: I never make preparatory sketches. I can only gauge the outcome of paintings later in the development of a body of work. It is a constant ebb and flow of control and chance.

I am interested in how thorough artists are in documenting their process and evolution of their works. Do you regularly document the making of your work whilst in the studio? Do you find documentation valuable to yourself?

RW: Not really. I take photos if I think something is going particularly poorly or well so that I can peek at it later when I get home in preparation for the next day. Rarely do these photos make it beyond my phone. When they do sneak onto my photo library I enjoy seeing the works in progress but it is more nostalgic than important.

What is a regular day within the studio like?

RW: I listen to music and make work. I jump from one piece and mode of working to the next always with multiple things going at once until exhibition deadlines draw near then I get more specific. I don't keep a computer in the studio.

Can you tell me about what you are currently working on within your studio?

RW: Right now I'm working on Tablet paintings and collage based paintings. These are made from the leftover pieces and materials of other types of work. They began as visual close-ups of previous bodies of work that manifested as all-over compositions. Micro and macro presentations of space are an ongoing concern. These new paintings have

since flattened out and become much more spacious than I originally intended.

The Tablet paintings are the works that we can see within our studio visit video, can you tell me a little about what sort of materials are you exploring within these works?

RW: The Tablets came about as wanting to present a single selection from other paintings. The first few were made to act as a visual rest within a solo show made up primarily of very dense centrally composed paintings. With the tablets, all of the information was pushed to the edge, with the center acting as a void. The rectangular shape of the canvas also mimicked the tiny, cut-paper rectangles that made up the mass of the other works. So it created this dialogue between if the tablets were to be received as a blow up of a small portion of the other works or vice versa. I was interested in them mainly as foils and a play on spatial engagement at first but then I began to see them as their own body of work that could be explored. Today, having made many of them, they continue to serve this idea but also are acting almost like slides of textures and color palettes that are going on in the studio. They have become indexical. The same technique for making the Omega Point paintings has since been applied to the Tablets. Now, the void takes on information and yields a completely different result. In this way the paintings now act beyond the monochrome. They appear as sheets of metal or actual screens like could be slid into an air filter or as a section of dry wall. This grey area of perception has become what is exciting to me about them.

Are these Table paintings inspired by Jo Baer's works from the mid - late 60's? In particular, Primary Light Group: Red, Green, Blue, which feature a similar border structure?

RW: Embarrassingly, I was unaware of Baer's work when I began making these. My studio mate at the time, Keegan McHargue was really into them and he brought up Baer and liked how they referenced her work. I looked her up and saw that the resemblance was so strong that I probably wouldn't have even made the paintings had I known about hers. The earliest Tablets look like sloppy Jo Baer paintings. Luckily I was already committed to them by that point. I had been thinking specifically about Ryman, Martin and Rothko. Where the edge of the middle of the Tablets meets the outer, framed edge, is always treated with blurry scumbling. I exploited that, what I always related to and admired in Rothko's handling, as the crux of the Tablets. Communing with this very

pure form of painting, the monochrome, which is quite precious in many ways, while at the same time appearing like industrial supplies and having very hands-on appearances is a big part of how I feel they become relevant rather than just a nod to fashionable minimalism. In person they are not minimal or precious.

Consensus I, II, III and IV is a series of works that play on what is real and what is an imitation; Consensus I is the encapsulation of a rock, whilst the following works consist of replications of the first rock, though this is difficult to see due to the various colours of tinted film applied to different surfaces of the cubed acrylic. Do you find that this series is a fusion, and exploration of nanotechnology and artificial intelligence?

RW: Those sculptures came about after I moved into a sculptor's studio and met a master mold maker. In the studio I found all of these left over pieces of sandstone and just kind of place them around. Down the street I was given some free tips and latex to make molds from and I Googled "latex mold making". Fake rocks are the most popular, simplest, hobbyist thing that this process is used for. It is really easy to make realistic looking rocks if they aren't referencing any specific rock. I'm absolutely in love with Giuseppe Penone's poetic works and with one piece in particular where he made a trompe l'oeil piece of a life-sized large river stone and placed it next to the original. This piece was a starting point for the Consensus sculptures.

I've looked to various sciences for inspiration for a long time and have always been aware of the fact that I could never be more than an amateur student of say particle physics; a novice with a subscription to Discover Magazine and a DSL connection. I'm excited when hobbyists get carried away in this arena and try to build time machines in their garages or truly believe that they have disproved the theory of Relativity in their down time. I'm just as naive about the specifics of what become starting points for my projects. This urge to feel significant and accomplish great things is what drives both the genius and the crackpot. The artist, the scientist and the dude wiring washing machines to microwaves to astral project are after some form of discovery. So I had these stones around which I painted white and began to arrange them into these formations much like the standing stones found at the caves of Lascaux and Chauvet which are among the first artworks ever created by humans. These types of arrangements are so associated with the "spiritual", or "mystic", these loaded, new age, tropes that aren't far off associations from my paintings. I wanted to make these kind of insignificant arrange-

ments that were impossible to be seen without a potential higher meaning. Like the mystery of Stonehenge but more like the miniature version from Spinal Tap. The vitrines physically block light in various ways and act as a filter or remove to the “energy” or “meaning” that one may think is inherent to the formations. Much like my paintings, the sculptures are at root formal exercises that can’t escape their loaded nature. I find this blur interesting and consistently try to find ways to play with it. The cube, the vitrine, the auto-tint, all act together to break down our notions of high versus low, art object versus science display. They appear to have the swagger that you mention as much as a civic with ground effects does. It’s fancy but cheaply. They relate to finish fetish aesthetic and the current trend of slick vitrine art but in my home-made, DIY, crappy sculptor way. They have a personal humor for me but speak to all of these other historical and current art movements and works that I admire. They’re much more earnest than snarky.

What projects and exhibitions do you have planned for 2013, and what should we expect with these?

RW: I have three solo exhibitions coming up with Marianne Friis in Copenhagen, Mark Moore gallery in Los Angeles and with Guerrero Gallery in San Francisco. Currently on view in NY is a two-person show with Matt Mignanelli at BSAC.

The Show with Marianne will be all Tablet paintings; a body of work that has been going on since around 2008. This will be the first time that they compose an entire space themselves rather than acting as foils to other types of paintings which is how they originally developed.

The California shows will both be from a new body of work that is collage based gestural abstraction.

Lets discuss Halsey McKay Gallery, for you are a co-director alongside Hilary Schaffner. How did Halsey Mckay evolve and how do you find promoting other artists whilst similarly developing a personal artistic career?

RW: It really came out of a casual conversation and happened very quickly.

I had always enjoyed curating shows and kind of entertained the idea of running a

gallery one day off in the future but never considered it as something that could actually happen. My partner Hilary Schaffner had worked at galleries and had just finished her MFA thesis, which took the form of a Fluxus based, curated 'zine rather than a focus on her own photography. She was more interested in curating than pursuing her own art career immediately. At the time she was running a small space in the front of a theater building that functioned as a gallery. She was able to do all of the programming and had put on excellent shows and garnered press from great publications but that model had kind of run its course for her and she was looking for what was next. I was curating a large, fun, group show for Eric Firestone Gallery East Hampton and we were talking about how we wished that we had a venue out there to do more focused solo exhibitions by less established artists out there. We starting batting around the idea of clearing out my or someone's studio with the idea a solo show for Joseph Hart to run during the group show at Eric's. That didn't seem like it was going to work so we toyed around the idea or renting a barn for a weekend or some other odd venue but that led to if we were going to spend any money on this idea that it should probably be on a space that people would actually be able to find and comfortable purchasing art in. So we decided to look and found a space that was within our modest budget, close to turnkey and willing to give us a 6-month lease. I'd say from the first conversation to having the keys was maybe 3 weeks.

At the time I had just finished up the work for a large solo show so I had a bit of down time. If ever I was going to have the time to dedicate to properly starting up something it was then. Hilary was ready to leave where she was and didn't really want to go to another large commercial gallery in the city. So really it was a combination of timing and naivety and now we're on our 3rd year with 13 represented artists and a rigorous schedule of exhibitions and art fairs.

I get asked a lot about how being so close to the commerce side affects my practice. Really, if anything, its been freeing. Asides from name recognition, there is very little way to predict what will be easy to sell. Our job as artists is to make what we feel we should be making and stay true to our practice. I just follow the thread that unravels in the studio and make what I want to. I think that shows through in my and every great artist's work. It's really apparent when artists are making what seems "market friendly." Good collectors aren't impressed by contrived work.

Halsey McKay is located in East Hampton, what is the gallery scene In East Hampton and how do you position the gallery amongst the local galleries?

RW: It really spans everything from crafts to major secondary market works. There are a lot of really interesting and great places. We are one of the only galleries focusing solely on emerging artists and the only one out there who formally represents them. There are a handful of spaces that have exciting programming but generally the focus is either more regional or further up the pole than those who we work with. We contextualize the artists that we represent and those that we discover amongst peers who are more established that we have the luxury of working with since we aren't located in NYC.

Can you discuss some of the highlights of Halsey McKay Gallery?

RW: I'm proud of the diversity and consistency of exhibitions that we have hosted. I'm surprised by how quickly we have been able to put on shows that interpret the space so differently and have our program maintain coherence. Helping to place friends' work that I believe in so thoroughly is a major highlight. I'm not going to pick a favorite show or anything. Nothing makes it through the door unless Hilary and I are completely excited about showing it.

[Ryan Wallace](#)

All images courtesy of Ryan Wallace