

KALEIDOSCOPE

KALEIDOSCOPE Issue #32
(Spring/Summer 18)



INTERVIEW BY CHRISTOPHER SCHRECK

Recent exhibitions have seen you branch out from your signature object-based oils to explore new mediums and modes, most notably (self-) portraiture. Will your show at Bodega follow in turn?

Yeah, I feel like it's the logical next step. The show is based around two large figurative paintings: one is myself as a drummer boy with a pink face, the other is a woman as a nurse, both in uniform. Then there's another set of paintings, decidedly not-figurative, more in the vein of those earlier object-based pieces, but much smaller and more dense. Then, framing the figurative works, there's a collection of small wooden sculptures shaped like pinwheels, which will line the top of the gallery. With my last group of paintings, I'd been exploring this idea of animating between works; I was originally going to aim for that effect with the smaller paintings, breaking the motion down canvas by canvas, but the idea gradually evolved into these literally kinetic sculptures.

These two characters, the drummer boy and the nurse—where did they come from?

They're based on drawings I'd done as a kid, but updated more in the style of Wayne Thiebaud's figurative paintings: analytical, fully fleshed out, with a flat background and an emphasis on the outfits. To me, the drawings seemed to depict what you're taught as a kid—all of these absurd delineations around gender, with grossly simplified roles and narratives. So in making the paintings, I approached the uniforms more like costumes, suggesting something fabricated or invented, almost vaudeville.

How do the compositions come together? Are you still combining found elements from online and IRL sources? Do you mock up the arrangements beforehand?

This show is a little different, as all of the works are based on photographs I took myself. The smaller pieces started with shots I took while walking around, but for the figurative paintings, I actually did in-studio setups, with lighting and costumes.

Why the change?

Well, the drummer boy character was originally an outtake from a series of photographs I produced last year. So I already had that image, and then when I found the kid's drawings, I knew he could "become" the soldier. From there, I did a similar revision of the nurse character, putting together an outfit and taking shots in the studio. But beyond that, it's still been the same basic process. The source material is still just a jumping-off point for further invention, and I'm still not mocking it up before I start—it all happens on the canvas. I'll put an object down, but maybe it's not right for the space; maybe it needs some lighting effect or surface treatment, or some added shadow to get the weight right. So I'll adjust lines, add and subtract objects, or whatever else until it feels right. It's very intuitive.

Would you say there's a cohering theme or tone to the exhibition?

I don't think about it in a linear or literal way, but there's usually an internal logic happening between the pieces, whether it's obvious or not. With this show, the work has something to do with optimism—or at least the appearance of optimism. It all started with a photo I took of a house with all of these pinwheels out front. It struck me as an alternative to having an American flag on your porch; it was saying something different, almost political. There are also a lot of underlying references to '60s pop, where you had these absurd pleasantries masking a deep social unrest, which obviously seems appropriate for today.