

In Conversation: Ryan Wallace & Timothy Bergstrom



Ryan Wallace, *Cusp*, 2012. Installation at Morgan Lehman Gallery.

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Ryan Wallace: I know that music and sound influence how you approach your paintings. Is this important to you in terms of their reception? Are you trying to conjure up more than “painting”?

Timothy Bergstrom: Oh yes my friend. However, it is quite strange, I am attempting to deal with my most core interests in painting (surface, color, form, content) and most of my painter friends do not see me as one. Laughs. I don't mind this, not because there is anything wrong with making a traditional painting, but I like it when things slip off of sticky definitions. I think this relates to the way I go about making— pictorially describing things that are intangible, like sound. This sets up a different hierarchy of importance, leading to different and personally surprising conclusions, then if I was only painting "off the cuff."

And what about you? Do you see yourself as a painter? Do you care? I've always thought you fetishized the your surface.

RW: At the core yes, though sculpture has become increasingly important. These works still come from my understanding of painting. They are essentially still lifes. For me, abstract paintings have inherent psychological connotations. The sculptures that I make are generally recognizable things. The manner in which the realist objects are created, allow them to emote a similar tone to the abstractions I make with paint or collage materials. What they do is more important to me than what they are. I find that surface helps to unify the work. They have a kind of touch or attention to materials that is of my sensibility, rather than it all being the same style or thing.

While I find beauty in your explorations in paint handling, surface and texture, I know that they are just as often received as jarring. I have heard the same painting be described as both a scab and a flower by different viewers. Are you trying to steer their reception?



Timothy Bergstrom, *Tantra Timbre*, 2012. Thermoplastic, wire, acrylic and pigment on canvas, 60 x 48 in.

TB: It is always exciting when an artwork evokes contradicting responses. If one person sees my work and says “ouch” and another says “ahhh” then I’m satisfied. What I am really after is dissonance; for both scab and flower at the same time. Fascinating that you say, “these works come from my understanding of painting.” I assume you’re speaking of your sculpture specifically, but I would even venture to say that your wall-based work does this as well! My favorite art operates in this manner, by pushing what

is known into an unknown direction. Some of the words that you just sent to me through cyberspace could have come directly out of Matisse's mouth. I think that is where it's at, looking forward and backward at the same time... Janusing.

Both of our painting uses unusual materials, do you see them this way? Does the material you use serve as way for you to develop your understanding of painting? Does it move your conversation with painting forward?

RW: Yes. This personal conversation plays into making several "types" of paintings. Each material and approach is physically capable of yielding specific types of pictures. I look to exploit what one material can do that another can't and this is constantly bringing new understandings to other approaches. I develop a thought or idea, find the medium or approach that seems to suit it best and then get out of the way as much as I can. Staying in dialogue with these varied approaches also keeps the studio practice fresh so I never feel like I'm just making more stuff. It always feels like a part of some quest.

While we're covering our conversation with painting, do you ever feel that the act puts you into dialogue with something more spiritual. I ask this as a staunch atheist, but can't overlook some new age business that we all tap into in our private room in which we make things. This has a lot to do with why I got so interested in particular sciences as a starting point for my work, but what are your thoughts. Doesn't there seem to be a ghost in the studio when things are going well?

TB: How does it FEEL? Spiritual is actually a perfect way of describing it—and it certainly operates that way—the religion of art. Laughs. I believe! But it is like most things; it can be used as a lens to research oneself and their surroundings. And maybe that is the "ghost", when things are going well, like having an interesting conversation, but being the only one in the room.

RW: A successful work introduces your ghost to your audience.