

Finding Beauty in Normality

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Brooklyn based artist, Paul Wackers, has worked as a painter in a handful of American cities. Hailing from Connecticut, he initially chose to go to the nation's capital in pursuit of fine arts. Although a great city, Washington DC is not normally a place that many artists flock too. Admitting it as an odd choice, he still claims to have found amusement in the experience. But that's Wackers, he can find amusement in almost everything. Along with his artistic capabilities, that is his unique skill. He can find diversion within predictabilities. That skill becomes even more apparent when discussing the subjects of his work- messy book shelves, plants in his studio, and even, cat furniture. Paul Wackers can take daily regularities and turn them into beautiful works of art. Using acrylic and spray paint, his pieces are one of a kind. Colorful, interesting, unique, but interestingly enough based off of the most common of things. With recent exhibition, "Almost Somewhere", Wackers discusses his art centric upbringing, city hopping and wide-ranging inspirations.

How did your interest in art begin to develop? How has your family assisted or influenced you in becoming an artist?

I grew up in Connecticut just outside of New Haven; I think art was always just something that was around. My mother was very interested in photography when I was born. She had a black and white darkroom at home for a while, which was something I resurrected for a time while I was in High School. She also worked in some local galleries so I would hang out there when I was a baby. Both of my parents have the arts of some kind in their families. My uncle on my father's side is a painter and sculptor; his name is Ruudt Wackers. He is still working and making things in the south of France, where he lives. My mother's brother was in museum administration in various forms. I was always around art, either just in my parent's home or a studio, museum or gallery. Growing up with it always around made it seem like the thing I was just supposed to follow, it never seemed out of step.



Why did you initially decide to go to art school in Washington DC? What was the art scene like over there?

I ended up in DC for school at the Corcoran college of art and design, but also because I had a few friends that moved there a year or so before who were a big influence on me. They were very active in the music scene in DC at the time, in bands like Cranium and Orthrelm from '97 until when I left in 2002. It was a very interesting time to be there, but strange as well. It had a very reactionary feel with all of the politics, but it also felt kind of like a bubble since it was so removed from the major cultural hubs on the east coast. It was just awkward and a little disconnected and hard to really quantify. Great museums there though.

After leaving Washington DC you went to San Francisco. How did moving there impact your work?

I really needed to get out of DC. The politics were not cool especially after 9/11; Bush was making it feel so shameful to be there. I needed to see another part of the country and I got accepted into the San Francisco Art institute so off I went. I really did not know what to expect. I had never really been there and I didn't know anyone living there at the time. Regardless, I think it was just perfect. There was a lot of energy and a great community of artists and musicians working there. People just seemed to mix it all together and things just kind of happened. I met some very inspiring people that taught me how to make and keep making art. Also, I think being in a smaller scene like San Francisco was a great place to figure out what I wanted to do. I did not have to compete with the hype of New York or Los Angeles, but I could still feel connected to it. That I think was the best thing about San Francisco back then. You could still live there and be broke and survive. Today, the city has been overrun by the tech community (or something like that). The move showed me how to breathe after growing up and living on the east coast where things get really tight.

How do you create one of your pieces? Take me through the process.

The process of making a painting really changes with each one. I tend to start with a general sense of how I want some thing to move or present itself, be it a tangle of plants or a presentation of bowls or rock as if in a display at a museum. Then I try to build up the background or setting to set the mood, to get the tone correct. This part I struggle with the most and often repaint this step many many times with only slight variation. After that is set I put in the meat of the painting and this is when I usually throw out my first idea and go with something else completely. I like being open to all sorts of changes and moments I can't rationalize I think it



lead to paintings that are more genuine instead of something that feels like its been forced into a shape its not comfortable with. Once that starts it's really just a fluid build up of responding to what's in front of me or seems to be missing. I always try to hold onto some sort of tension or balance within the image. It's hard to get into specifics on how I make them since it seems like an always changing process.

You've said that films and newspaper articles inspire your work. What specific films or articles have you drawn inspiration from?

I can't really say what specifically influenced me, but I used to watch an insane amount of films (I worked at a video store for almost 10 years, shout out to Lost Weekend Video). I was in love with the way images would get placed into this rectangle, the different ways to frame things and the bizarre perspective that some filmmakers would play with. I watched a lot of 70's and 80's horror movies, like Friday the 13th, that had a real barebones and DIY kind of approach, where what ever worked was the answer, but not always the right one. I think of my paintings as composed with a more cinematographic quality, or at least I did. Things have changed a little bit.

What other types of things motivate your paintings? How did you come up with the series "Almost Somewhere"?

The other things that creep into my work are just my surroundings. I have a lot of plants in my studio and they always find a way into my paintings. Lately, I have been working in more of a still life sort of format, finding bigger themes in a narrower focus than before, often repainting like objects to see the big differences in small variations.

That's where a lot of the work from the show I did at Narwhal Art projects for "Almost Somewhere" evolved. It was looking at the things around me and seeing where they could take me, but also finding new things to investigate by focusing on what was right in front of me. Even though I think they reflect more than just personal spaces.

Are you inspired by any other artists?

That list is almost too big and I keep adding to it every day.

So here is a quick one off the top of my head: Lesley Vance, Tomma Abts, Peter Doig, Luc Tuymans, Peter Shire, Jonas Wood, Shio Kusaka, Chris Johanson, Paul Outerbridge, Matisse (of course), Anthony Caro, Aaron Curry. So many more I really can't name and all for different reasons. But these are some of the ones I often return too to get excited.



You utilize spray paint, but your work seems so structured. Do you use stencils? How do you create a full piece using acrylic and spray paint?

I do use stencils and other masking methods. I try really hard to build that structure. It is something that sometimes fails spectacularly or just works effortlessly. I can never really tell which is which. The spray paint is mostly something used to accent things the bulk of the work is all paint on a brush.

What can we look forward too in your next series?

I've been doing some research into cat trees (cat furniture). We will see where that takes me....

*Read the original interview in spanish on [Pull the Metal](#)
Photos courtesy of [Paul Wackers](#) & [Heather Culp](#)*