

VAGABOND CITY



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NICOLE LANE interviews ANDREW HOLMQUIST

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Bathers, oil and acrylic on canvas, 94.5 x 78.75 in, 2016

Where are you from? How did you begin your painting practice?

I'm from Northfield Minnesota, a lovely small town less than an hour south of the Twin Cities. I had the great fortune of being born into a family of artists. My parents are potters and my dad is also a high school art teacher and they recognized my interest in drawing from a young age and encouraged me in many ways. I have fond memories of family trips to the Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Art as well as the summer art programs they enrolled me in at Macalester College and the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

To your other question, I wonder what the moment is, or was for me, when a 'practice' begins? Probably the distinction of a practice comes after the bubble of school, when you're on your own working a full-time job and somehow find a way to keep painting with regularity and stakes. I think my painting practice began when I moved into my closet and used my bedroom as a studio, when I found tricks, like making a small painting every day for a month, to add structure and dedication. I think my painting practice was maintained by the contact I had with my peers that were doing ambitious and exciting projects after school that motivated me to keep up with them. And I think my practice was propelled by the opportunities that eventually came to exhibit my work in group shows in apartment galleries that lead to solo shows in bigger spaces.



Locker Room, oil and acrylic on canvas, 84 x 72 in, 2015

Can you talk about the figures in your paintings? What do they represent to you as abstract structures?

The figures act as a point of reference for a more empathetic, specific experience with the ambiguous events in the painting and provide flexible rules for how the paint should behave. Abstraction in my paintings is often a physicalization of a metaphysical experience. I'm interested in the slippery boundary between the exterior world and our interior experience of it. What causes swells of emotion, time to freeze, gravity to lift, imaginary passageways to open in and through regularly impenetrable bodies? For me these moments are fleeting. Occasionally I'll be stopped dead in my tracks by an overwhelming beauty, a burst of humor, a shock of fear, or rush of arousal that quickly overflows and spills between my fingers, lost to the next moment. Impossible to hold on to but in my paintings I try to hold on a bit longer, to revel in it and share with others my specific goose bumps code.

So how do you represent a moment like this? I think it would be made up of specific details from the setting and characters – bits of the tennis shoes he was wearing and the way the sun draped over his cheekbones as it bent to meet my eyes – but it would also have a bit of the stomach that dropped out from under me and the dust from the ceiling tiles I broke through as I flew backwards through the roof.



Swim Meet, oil and acrylic on canvas, 84 x 72 in, 2015

Who are some of your influences?

Something that excites me is how my answer to this question is so different today from a year ago, and so very different from when I was a freshman in college. Some influences stay longer than others, others burn bright but don't last. Kind of like friends I think. Who do you count among your lifelong friends and who did you just meet and are excited to get to know a bit better? Who do you now recognize was a bad influence, and who have you fallen out of touch with but may be surprised to find is your best friend a few years from now when you meet them again at a different point in your life?

Friends I hang out with regularly or people I recently met and hope to be friends with:

Tal R, Rebecca Horn, David Hockney, Fra Angelico, Caravaggio, Pontormo, Paul Klee, Philip Guston, Moebius, Louise Bourgeois, Chris Ofili, Martin Creed, Eduardo Paolozzi, David Bomberg, Stuart Davis, Kerry James Marshall, Franz West

Long distance friends I keep in touch with:

Willem de Kooning, Cy Twombly, Amy Sillman, Picasso, Matisse, Albert Oehlen, Dana Schutz, Alex Katz, Yuichi Yokoyama, Max Beckmann, Oskar Schlemmer, Charlene Von Heyl

Best friends from back home:

Toulouse Lautrec, Goya, Cézanne, Alice Neel



Strong LQQk (Queen), colored pencil, gouache, spray paint and collage on paper, 55 x 77 in, 2017

Can you discuss your studio practice and how you confront your projects?

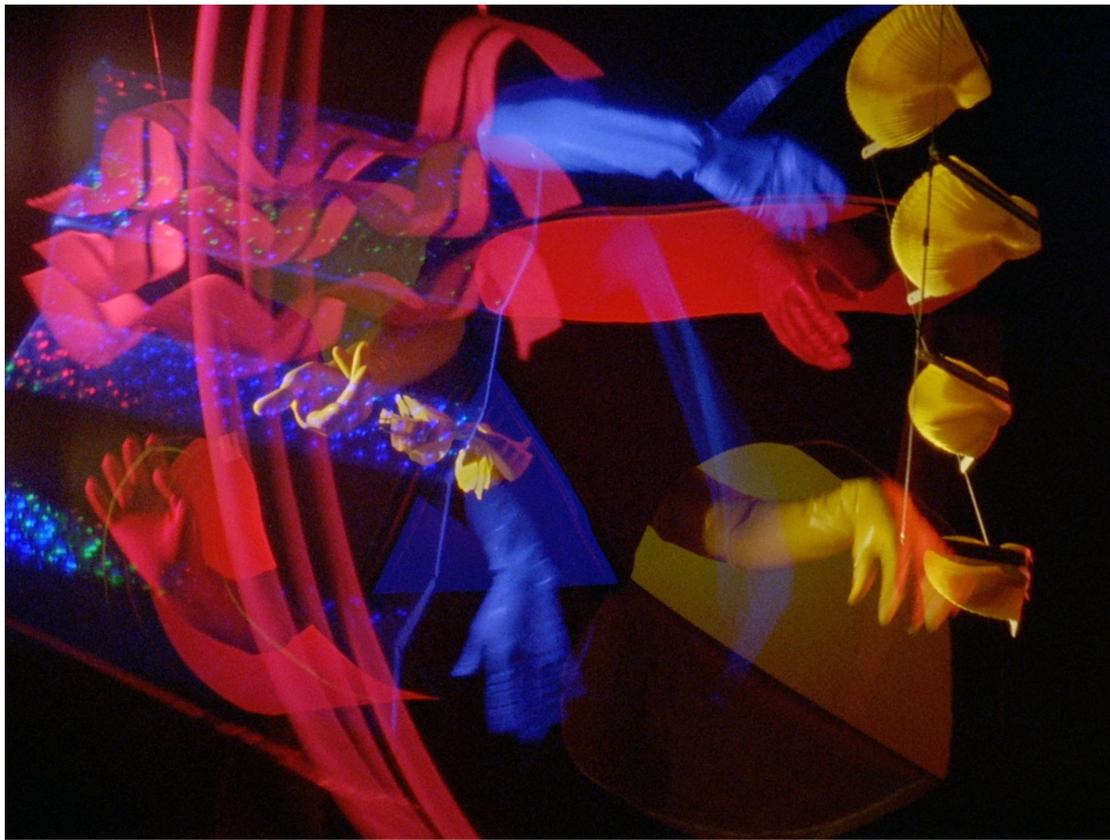
Since I moved to Berlin last year I have worked to develop a consistent routine in the studio. I usually start with stretching and meditation, move on to a small drawing as a warm-up, then I shift towards working on a larger project that will take a few weeks to complete, and might end the day with administrative tasks.

I have two main directions in which my work is currently developing. The oil paintings on canvas are increasingly choreographed. I start with a pencil sketch that gets scanned and brought in to Photoshop where I work out the colors. I then make a small painting to figure out how to mix the right colors and test out how I might go about building the painting. I then will mix up all of the paint and medium that I will need for the entire painting ahead of time to get that speed bump out of the way. I'll project the drawing onto the canvas, trace it with a liner brush and lay down a base color of acrylic. At this point I have so much of the piece done before I've really even begun to put the paint on the canvas. Despite how plotted it is there are still surprises and invention at this stage so its not just laying bricks.

On the flip side I have the works on paper which are very improvisational from the outset. I currently work in two fixed sizes with these, 19 x 25 or 77 x 55 inches, so that's one limiting structure I start with. I will also have a specific pallet of colors in mind, I generally know its going to be an abstracted figure striking a pose and I tend to use colored pencils and gouache. From there I just jump in and get as much filled in as quickly as I can before the steam runs out and then pause to see what happened. For the smaller drawings I might enter back into them a handful of times before they feel resolved, but with the bigger drawings it will take weeks. I'll build it up in sections and over time these sections get stitched together. The most exciting moments are when something doesn't come together like I had expected and now its time to mess it up again, throw some dynamite in the mine in the hope of discovering a new way forward.

The pendulum swings between these two processes, and between small and large scales and it keeps things fresh and adjustable to suite my mood or situation. When I'm working on one I often wish I was working on the other.

In the last 4 years I've added projects into the fold that are outside of painting and drawing. These have included ceramic sculptures, videos and films, costume design, and comic books. Some of these, like the film and the costume construction, have been collaborations. Others like the comic books I make on my own but work with printers to create the final product. I've found that working in these other mediums, and with collaborators, allows new ideas to come out that aren't bogged down in the craftsmanship and history of painting. Comic books lend themselves to more direct narrative rather than the ambiguous abstraction in my painting. The videos and films bring to life the implied performance and motion in my paintings. The sculptures deal with real space rather than imaginary space and you can see their backside. All of these projects use the language of painting I have developed but skew it in productive ways. They are intense and often fun and last for a fixed amount of time and then I move back to painting.



Film still from "Magic Hands", 16mm film, 6:16 min, 2016

How do you think about your paintings in relation to your video work?

The videos started out from the impulse of wanting to be more literally present in the work. Painting can be performative but the performance is hidden from the viewer and all you get is the static artifact of that performance at the end. I love the static artifact, don't get me wrong, but it didn't scratch the itch that live performance on a stage can have. I traded in the four edges of the canvas for the four edges of the screen and composed abstract pictures in front of the camera, often in one extended take, out of both familiar objects like ladders and umbrellas but also peculiar, unnameable handmade components. I wanted to reveal, in a campy playful way, the accumulating gestures that eventually lock into a fixed composition that are otherwise buried from view in a finished painting.

Last year I collaborated with filmmaker Alexander Stewart on a 16mm short film called "Magic Hands". I wanted to work with film because the vivid color and texture of film related more closely to my paintings and I wanted to play with multiple overlapping exposures. If in the videos I was building accumulating objects in front of the camera to create a painterly experience, in the film I could layer accumulating exposures within the camera. The opening shot of "Magic Hands" layers three sets of vividly colored arms waving and crossing paths in front of a black background. Where the translucent arms overlap the two colors mix to create a third. As the film progresses low-tech special effects get layered into the gesticulating arms, such as bubbles, feathers, or silly string shot on a pane of glass in front of the camera. By the final shots there are twelve overlapping exposures that build up to create a colorful abstraction out of recognizable parts. Shooting on film with multiple exposures also introduced a high-stakes quality that feels related to painting. Whatever happens in that live moment can't be undone.

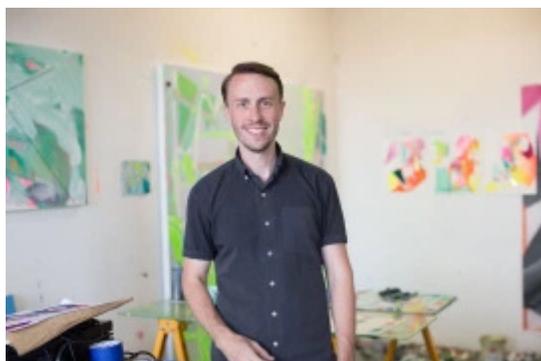


Contortionist, glazed ceramic, 15.5h x 11w x 9d in, 2016

Your work is pretty vibrant. Can you discuss the importance of color in your paintings and in your video work?

My childhood was filled with plastic neon action figures, super hero comics and cartoons, transparent pink and blue pool toys and Aladdin. I think a big part of my color sense comes from this bedrock source material.

Also, if my paintings are depictions of an uncanny, slanted version of reality it makes sense to use colors that are dialed up a few notches from their natural state.



Andrew Holmquist (b. 1985) is a Berlin based artist. He received his BFA and MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He currently has work in the exhibition “Eternal Youth” at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, on view through July 23rd. He is represented by Carrie Secrist Gallery.