Zéh PALITO

Collectible DRY,

Visual voices

June 2025



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VISUAL VOICES

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Emmanuel Perrotin, Louise Thurin, and Pharrell Williams, 2025. Photo ©Tanguy Beurdeley. Courtesy Perrotin.

ON THE 20TH MARCH PERROTIN PARIS OPENED THE IMMENSE GROUP EXHIBITION FEMMES SHOWCASING 39 ARTISTS OF AFRICAN, AFRICAN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN HERITAGE. THE EXHIBITION CURATORS PHAR-RELL WILLIAMS AND EMMANUEL PERROTIN DESCRIBE FEMMES AS "INVITING EVERYONE IN". AN OPPORTU-NITY FOR A CONSTELLATION OF ARTISTIC PRACTICES TO COMMUNE TOGETHER, BE IN DIALOGUE WITH ONE ANOTHER AND CELEBRATE THE LEGACY OF INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS INCLUDING BETYE SAAR, CARRIE MAE WEEMS, SEYNI AWA CAMARA AND ESTHER MAHLANGU.

LIKE ALL GROUP SHOWS THERE IS SO MUCH TO TAKE IN. HOW DO YOU SIT WITH EACH ARTIST AND GIVE SPACE TO THEIR WORK WHILST ALSO LISTENING TO THE CHORUS CALLS THAT ARISE WHEN THEY ARE BROUGHT TO-GETHER? THE EXHIBITION AS GATHERING SPACE IS LESS ABOUT CREATING A UNIFYING VOICE, AND MORE ABOUT GIVING SPACE TO EACH PART OF THIS POLYPHONIC VISUAL ORCHESTRA. IN THAT VAIN, FEMMES ACTS AS AN ENTRY POINT, AN INVITATION AND IN DOING SO FACILITATED THE UNMISSABLE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO SOME OF THE EXHIBITING ARTISTS IN THE SHOW; ALEX GARDNER, EDEN TINTO COLLINS AND ZÉH PALITO.

AUTHOR AND CURATOR LOUISE THURIN DESCRIBES FEMMES AS "AN ANTHEM, LEADING THE MARCHING BAND OF BLACK JOY". IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES WE ISOLATE THREE OF THE ARTISTS IN THAT MARCHING BAND AND PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE INDIVIDUAL SONGS OF THESE FORMIDABLE VISUAL STORYTELLERS.

CAIRO CLARKE

CONVERSATION

WITH

ZÉH PALITO

Zéh Palito is a storyteller and cultural observer who provides insight into contemporary Africar diasporic life through painting. Zéh Palito has made art murals over 30 countries between Africa, Asia, Americas and Europe. He has exhibited work at Museum Zeitz MOCAA and KunstMuseum Basel, The Baltimore Museum of Art and Saint Louis Art Museum, United States, X Museum, Beijing, China, Museum Inhotim in Brazil, Perrotin, Paris and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. Among his solo exhibitions some highlights are, "Between the world and me" at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Queretaro, Mexico, "Eu sei porque o pássaro canta na gaiola" - Galeria Simões de Assis, Brazil, the "Untouchable Negritude" - Luce Gallery, Italy and "Tropical Diaspora" at the Eubie Blake Cultural Center, Baltimore, USA.

ZÉH PALITO, Christopher Walking, 2024. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160 x 125 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

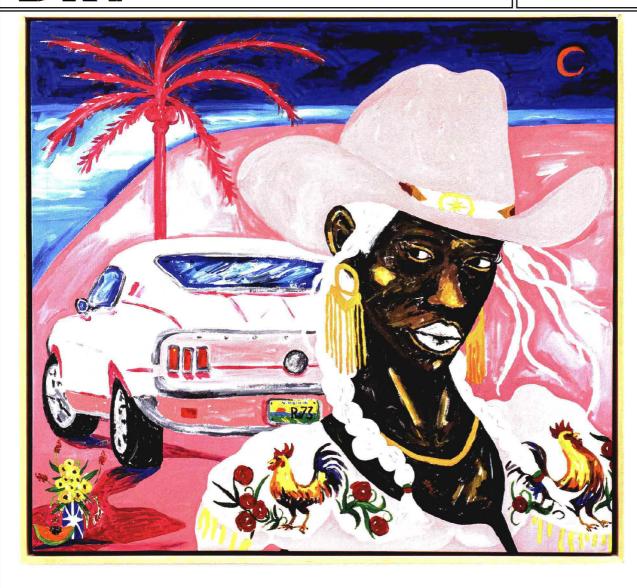


Portrait of Zéh Palito



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ZÉH PALITO, Know who you are, 2025. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 82 x 75 cm Courtesy of the artist and Perrotir

What ideas are currently circulating in your practice?

I always like to work with a series. Currently I am working on this series called "Cars, Pools, and Melanin." which is the same name of my most recent solo show at Gallery Perrotin in New York. When I say the name of this series most people wonder why cars and pools, what's the connection, right? Well, cars and pools are two simple elements that are part of our daily life and are mostly related to leisure and transportation. But when we associate those two elements with Black figures and large amounts of melanin, we can also find the history of racial segregation and liberation in the United States.

In many places of the United States public pools were not allowed to be used by Black people until the 70s, which is really not that long ago. At the same time cars were used as a tool to avoid segregation. I'm thinking about the Green Book, the guide for African Americans to find out which highways, hotels, and restaurants they could use to avoid racism until the middle of 60s. This series references difficult times but also very inspiring stories. I want to use all

of our traumas, social and racial problems that we suffer as a tool of motivation and to show our strength and beauty even with all the adversity. I want my art to talk about the experiences of Black bodies and minorities in moments of leisure, love, happiness, empowerment and confidence. I want these portraits of Black people that I paint to have them as the protagonists of their own stories.

As a visual storyteller much of your work focuses on uplifting marginalised communities. What experiences or influences in your life have shaped this commitment?

I come from a family that is financially poor but rich in love. I never got financial support from them but I always got a lot of emotional support, which I think was the best thing I could ever ask for. The experiences and influences that I had in my life have shaped who I am right now and have developed what my message is or what I want to give to the world. I like to say visual storyteller because I think that paintings can be platforms for an idea. The idea of representation is really interesting to me, how to reference culture and history throughout the paintings. I am trying to make paintings that are about profound



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ideas rather than the things that affect me individually in daily life. I like to paint figures and I want them to seem self assured, figures with confidence, that for once can be the protagonist of their own history. Especially giving the history of Black people, is somehow compromised and always traumatic with a big lack of representation in art history. So for me uplifting our stories will always be the intention for my work. There is a mural that my friend Derrick Adams painted in St Louis with the title "Lift as You Climb". I love that title, it's a simple, powerful and very community oriented sentence.

What are your earliest memories of painting and what drew you to this medium?

My earliest memories of painting was when I was a teenager. When I was 15 years old I used to like skateboarding and soccer but I got a knee injury so I could not do those sports anymore. I remember being sad about it during that time. So my mother put me in an art class, which was the one thing that I loved to do the most growing up. I have many memories from my childhood enjoying comic books and as a teenager doing graffiti in Brazil. I always loved to express myself and to share a message. I guess I shared this message and expressed myself through different mediums as a kid with drawing, as a teenager with graffiti and now as an adult with my canvases.

How do different locations and cultures influence the way you approach a new piece?

I love anthropology, I guess if I was not an artist I would love to be an anthropologist. For me, different locations and cultures are like new colours added to my palette or new ideas for my brain. Every place I go, every community I step into, it changes me a little. it teaches me something. The way people move, the way they dress, the food, the music, the energy. It all becomes part of the artwork. I don't come in trying to impose my vision, you know? I come to listen. I soak in the stories, the struggles, the joy, the rhythm of the place and I create something. My work is about celebrating life, about resistance, about beauty in the everyday, especially in communities that the world tends to overlook. So when I'm in a new location whether it's in Brazil, Zambia, or the U.S. I try to reflect what's already there, but through my lens and my life experience. The message might shift a bit, the symbols might evolve, but the heart stays the same: connection, joy, and dignity. So I would say that different places absolutely shape the atmosphere, the soul, and even the message of each painting or exhibition that I make.

What draws you to the use of plants, fruit and nature in your work, can you talk about the symbolism and mythology/iconography that is present?

I always paint what I see and what I have lived. My studio is on a farm so I am surrounded by nature in my everyday life. For me, plants, fruits, the natural world- they are not just background elements, but they are living symbols of resilience, joy, and abundance. I grew up in Brazil, surrounded by lush landscapes, where nature is so much a part of daily life. So it's deeply personal, but also deeply spiritual. In

many Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures, plants and fruits hold sacred meanings. Mangoes, bananas, papayas, the palm leaves, they're not just food, they're medicine, they're stories, they're offerings. They carry ancestry. When I include nature in my work, I'm honouring that connection. A banana is never just a banana, it can be joy, sensuality, a symbol of tropical life or of sharing. Plants growing out of a figure's head might represent knowledge, growth, rebirth. How we are always evolving, always in conversation with the Earth. And I love how nature disrupts things, it breaks the concrete, grows through cracks, refuses to be tamed. Just like the communities I represent in my art, resilient and beautiful. Using natural elements is a way for me to bring softness, power, and a bit of magic to my art. It's a celebration, but also a symbol of resistance.

Your work feels like a continually unfolding story, each work is like an intimate moment from a wider world. How does a new piece start for you? What does research look like?

Some of my paintings are from my dreams. I think my paintings become portals for the viewer, where I am portraying different histories and experiences. I guess most of my paintings are a little dreamlike and joyful. I think the paintings are excavations of Black celebrations that occur across time and space, both in the real and imaginary world. Hove to share ideas, so I do a lot of research before I transform that idea into a painting. Each piece is like a snapshot from this big, vibrant, soulful universe I'm building over time. But it always starts with reading, listening to music or to someone. Music is always playing when I am in the studio. It's an important part of my process when making a painting. I start composing. I think in terms of rhythm, balance, emotion. The colours I choose, the postures, the objects, they all come from what I've absorbed. It's intuitive, but deeply rooted. I want to make paintings that suggest how I want you to see me and us navigating in black and brown skin or any other minority groups. I try to leave the traumas apart and I try to tell you who we are, how I see us and how I want you to see me and us. I come from Brazil, a country of huge African Diaspora, a tropical country which is very colourful and vibrant. So of course that has a big influence on the way I portray people. It is a place that is always very bold, vivid and happy, just how I want our identity to be portrayed in this story of our lives.

What is upcoming for you that our readers can look forward to?

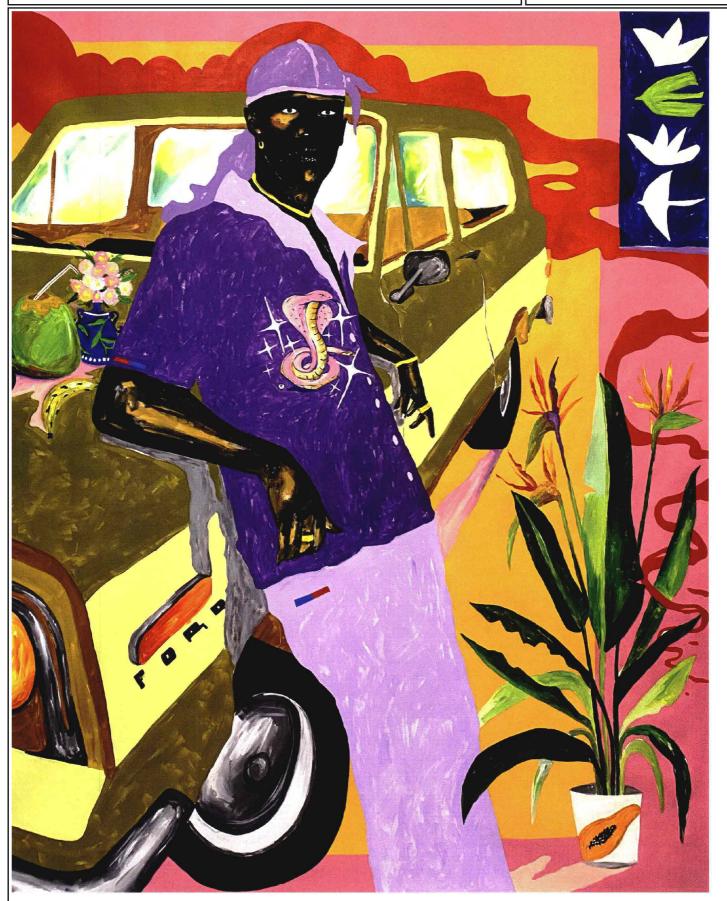
I'm excited about what's coming, there's always something new on the horizon, right? Right now I'm working on new pieces for group shows in the US and Europe. I am also doing two big public murals this year. But I think the most exciting thing for me this year is my first solo museum exhibition in Brazil. I want to keep pushing boundaries and telling stories that need to be heard and make more paintings. At the same time I just want to enjoy my simple life, my family, my dogs, my farm and keep sharing my art with the world. But my main goal is always to make paintings to celebrate, elevate, represent and document the everyday lives of these people who in some way resemble me. I guess the readers can expect more art to come, always.

ZÉH PALITO, Orpheus' Sunday in Crenshaw, 2022.



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CAIRO CLARKE

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Eden Tinto Collins (she/them/us, FR) developed her practice in visual arts through the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts de Paris Cergy. She explores the notions of networks and interdependence, the fereictions between melancholy, mythology, post-trans, and cyber-humanity. Since 2021, in partnership with Societies and the Worms Prestige association, Eden Tinto Collins has been developing the "acéphale studio", a third-party space for residencies, workshops and workshops in Joinville-le- Pont, as well as a production structure named Ka Libre Ensemble behind a number of projects including "Numin" (a space opera) and "A Pinch Of Kola" (a quantum sitcom) based on an original idea by Johanna Makabi, and also the registered trademark of Acéphale Studio, for Non- Fungible Objects. In 2023, she was the winner of the 24th Pernod Ricard Foundation Award, "Do You Belive In Ghosts?" based on a curation by Fernanda Brenner, and in 2024 her first solo exhibition in Belgium, "Roaming The Imaginal" (curators Sofia Dati and Niels Van Tomme) took place at the Beursschouwburg.

EDEN TINTO COLLINS

Hi Eden, is such a pleasure to talk with you! Can I start by asking where you're based at the moment?

Right now I'm in Brussels, I moved from Paris a year ago. But I kept my studio there which allows me to be in between both places.

How was it moving between the two spaces?

It's a lot of trains, but it's also interesting to be in this subtle difference between Paris and Brussels as cities, and two different countries. I'm discovering a whole new environment. Brussels has a larger international position, it's a hub. Trains are taking me to different places I would never have discovered without moving. So it's a nice period.

Your practice feels like a constantly evolving constellation made up of many different parts, which now includes living across two cities/countries. How would you describe your artistic practice?

Thank you for what you said, it's true that the constellation is a model that I relate to. The way we surf the internet is also something that guides my approach to creating an ecosystem which often ends up becoming an installation. It's a way to get together many mediums and to crystallise different layers of address by combining dialogue with the spiritual realm, storytelling, fiction... Its not direct criticism of society or a particular space in the world, my practice is more concerned with repair. It's really about rectifying something.

Are there particular things you're trying to rectify through your practice at the moment?

It's very linked to vitality, I like to think of it in the way you interact with a garden. You are always taking care of those objects, lives, spirits that are there. You keep talking with them, engaging with them through constant conversation. At first I needed to know who I was talking with. Within my own community I feel bonded to constantly questioning what our topics of conversation are and what could be rectified within our communities. There is no universality, but there is always something that is unifying or intersecting in our lives as a collective experience. I think talking about diversity in unity is something that I need to do.

Which relates back to your reference of the garden and being a caregiver or steward. For example a monoculture can't develop or sustain itself. You need polycultures and biodiversity to sustain each other in life. It's interesting to see how that ethos manifests in your work. Because working in installation is also creating a space where many different elements come

together. How does collaboration manifest in your practice?

Through artistic encounters. First, we may connect across intere sts or if there is an emergency it is more organised, but I feel like the encounter is prioritised and gives birth to I don't know what. At the beginning it is still unformed, but sometimes we need to crystallise an encounter through objects, materials, virtual relations. That's how I start making music, with an encounter. During a festival in Paris called Black(s) to the Future I was making a performance and proclamation. It was in 27th, so we met there, and we decided to hang around Paris. There are many events that are gathering Black communities in Paris and we were hanging around those types of events and while walking in the streets, we noticed that there were a lot of things we could say about our present moment and things that we were experiencing in daily life. There was this atmosphere of fascism and the Great Replacement Theory was a big topic, things like that. So we started to say, well this topic has come up again, maybe we should rectify and talk about it. That's how the film Womxn, The Nightmare of You Know Who came about. That was also the first occurrence of a persona I created called Jane Dark in reference to Jeanne d'Arc the martyred French icon.

So real world everyday encounters spark a dialogue between whoever you're collaborating with and then that develops into something quite organically?

Yeah, there is no systematic theme I want to deal with. I feel this also offers some fluidity to my work and how it engages with culture. I feel like culture is not seen as part of nature. In French, for example the word farmer is linked to the world culture. So there is a root that creates a pathway where we see culture linked with nature, and also in the arts and cultural spaces there is this underlying connection.

They're not distinct, not two separate things.

I wish they were not two separate things, but I feel like many are artists are also into those boundaries. But for me, I'm interested in creating links to the spiritual and the virtual realms. I think culture is in really close relation to the soul.

In your work there's a relationship between the ancestral, the embodied and also the digital as well. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between the spiritual and digital realms?

That relationship firstly for me is embodied. It comes from the simple fact of losing close people who passed away for different reasons. The effects and affects of loss is very revealing, but also somewhat taboo. I feel like a lot of the processing of those mo-



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Eden Tinto Collins, Rock & Scroll Motto Medi[t]ation for a Filter, 2020 – 2024. Photo ©Aurélie Bayad.

ments happens in solitude. And at the same time suddenly communication also disappears. The occult origin of the telephone was linked to the idea of talking with dead people. I remember this example of the necrophone, which gave birth to a version of the mobile phone. So the way that these devices are created is very spiritual to me. Then the idea of creating a dialectic or a poetic semantic that could allow this to flow was very important as a way to start talking to people through my work and with the the ancestors

The word hypermedia comes up a lot in reference to your work, what does that mean to you?

Yes, it's true. I didn't know how to define my practice in one word, so two words came. At first it was *poetician*, this relation to people and poetry and also *hypermedia* which is not a word that I've invented, but I think it's Carol Brandon who first came to me with this word. I don't know if we are using this word in the same way, but for me everything in life became so noisy. A lot of logos, brands, information everywhere. The term *transmedia* or multimedia is used a lot but I think *hypermedia* also deals with technologies that are yet to come. *Hypermedia* was a way to embody all the layers of information and to talk about this theoretical background.

This issue is thinking through The Care. Personally, I believe care is an active state. In recent years care has been commodified, commercialised and also privatised. In your life and practice, how does care manifest?

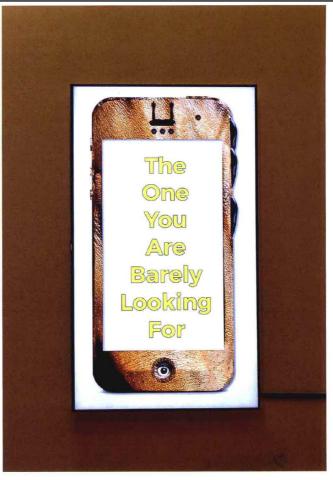
I think through empathy. Simply because empathy guides the way we try to rectify anything. It's also really linked to life forces, like where there's a lack of life forces we need to be there.

Yeah, I agree. It's not really a difficult question at the end of the day, is it? I think humans just make it more difficult than it actually needs to be! The materiality and texture of your work is so multifaceted and layered, but there's also like a really strong visual aesthetic to it. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that?

Yes, of course. It's true that the layers are super important. In my installations, the aesthetics are really linked to low tech types of production because for now I do not want to follow standards that are very neat. I'm also trying to work with what I'm able to afford and not everyone always has the opportunity to work with very high quality materials. It's also too much for the Earth, so I'm trying to reduce what I use, so me it's like working in "informatique" like when you start your computer on Safe Mode.

I really like that. It's also is another example of how care and consideration is woven into your work aesthetically. Working with what is available to you and keeping the vitality of the Earth, that larger garden in mind also. Where can people see your work at the moment?

There is an exhibition that started on the 5th of April called *Nothing but the Truth* curated by Flora Fettah at Kadist Foundation in Paris. I think it's really a beautiful exhibition so I'm very happy to present a piece there. I am also participating in the group show FEMMES at Perrotin in Paris.





Eden Tinto Collins, Portrait. Photo ©Dhiaa Biya



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CAIRO CLARKE

IN CONVERSATION WITH

ALEX GARDNER



to be in a liminal space. I'm interested in the emotionality of your work. You mentioned that it is in a period of change, but your figures are often rendered without facial features. What drew you to this and how it evolved over time?

I try to keep it ambiguous, so there is space for what the viewer is feeling. As far as the sparseness of the work and the environment, I didn't want to create portraits of people. As I've said before, I don't want to create portraits of people or specific culture places. I just want it to be this simple, universal representation of a person and for them to exist in an almost psychological space.

It feels like there is a tension between intimacy and spaciousness. How do you approach that emotional balance, what informs the emotionality?

It's about relationships, right? So whether it's just someone with their friend or their partner, or on a larger scale whether it's you and your boss, the government. I'm talking a lot about power structures as well. Who has power in what moment? So there's this feeling of comfort, but also maybe oppression or something, you know.

What is the process of getting to the point of extracting the essence of a moment, relationship, power structure and transforming it into a painting?

In the beginning, it was a lot about my own life, my own experiences, the world and the way in which I see it. Then I would start listening to other people's opinions. There would be different books I'm thinking about while I'm making different shows, conversation I'm having with friends or family while I'm out. Something that someone says or a thought that I would have that would feel kind of significant. So I'd write it down and have a notes folder of titles that

Alex Gardner captures the nuances of relationships through luminous paintings. The ambiguous backdrop of his canvases mirror the malleability of Gardner's pitch-black figures. Rather than imparting definitions, Gardner offers solace in an indefinite ecosystem polluted with information. Gardner has exhibited in Paris, Stockholm, New York, London, Beijing, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Copenhagen, and Mexico City. In 2019, the SCAD Museum of Art mounted the first U.S. museum exhibition of the artist's work.

What does this moment in time look like for you in the studio, in life, what ideas are currently circulating in your practice

I just had my second kid in November. So I'm really just trying to be a good father right now, and I don't know what that looks like as an artist. Making art was a very natural thing to do. Spending a lot of time alone, indulging my own thoughts and spending time in the studio. But now, as a family man, I'm trying to be a better communicator, be better at spending time with people and being present. Having kids just really changes your life and in more ways than I could have ever imagined. That being said, with everything going on in the world, the time we live in and the effects of our phones and social media changing the way we consume information and propaganda; all this stuff is weighing on me as well as it's weighing on everyone else. At the same time. I think I'm the most optimistic I've ever been in my life and I'm trying to bring that into my work. I always try to make humorous and pretty work to offset some of the darker narratives that are taking place in it, but right now I'm trying to be more explicitly optimistic.

The environments you create in your work seem to strip away the context while heightening emotion. There are really strong visual layers that draw you in.

Yeah the idea is trying to bring optimism, happiness and the brighter side to life because obviously everyone's suffering and suffering is an inevitable part of life. But since we're all alive we got to be able to just kind of enjoy it as well.

I also think when you're in times that are so completely insane, chaotic and broken down, it does create room, at least in your mind, to really like materially think of alternatives in terms of your ethics and how you actually want to be in the world. I can relate to that sense of wanting to contribute something different to what is existing.

Definitely, in America, it feels like our culture has been rotten for so long. Now that I have kids I really think about what kind of person I want them to be. Obviously, they're going to be their own people and I can't control any of it. But they will learn a lot from me and mirror me in a lot of ways. So I really think about what kind of person I am and what values I have that I want to try to pass on to them. When it comes to the art itself I've been thinking a lot about escapism. Which maybe feels like a cop out but while life in general has always been kind of chaotic and tragic, now we have these horrific images and stories being produced and fed to us in a way that I think is really unhealthy. It's causing us to focus more on fear and anxiety. So maybe it's a good time to try and stop consuming that stuff. It feels like you're running away from these things, but I think some of it has to just be accepted as inevitabilities.

It's interesting that you're thinking about escapism because your work often feels like floating or reflecting. There is this kind of spaciousness to maybe not necessarily escape, but



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Photo @Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of Perrotin.

ALEX GARDNER, Psychic Stamina, 2024.

Bronze sculpture with the pillars made in stainless steel.

Portrait of Alex Gardner



I'll draw from. Sometimes I'll have the idea for a painting before I know what it's about or have a title.

The titles of your work feel like a really important component. There is often this layer of humour or honesty that adds an emotive or tonal layer to reflect on as the viewer.

It's so hard to title stuff because you don't want to narrow down, how it can be interpreted. I think for me painting in general is this thing where I get to make it alone and then the work sits and interacts with the audience without me.

How did you come to painting?

I was always into drawing, I made music a little bit when I was younger and tried to make video projects and stuff. I was always into making stuff and things that I can do alone. I studied illustration at a regular university. It wasn't an art school, but they have a good art program there. I did this illustration programme to learn how to draw and learn about colour and light. I always had a lot to say, but I didn't really have a visual style. Some people say style isn't that important, but I think I just grew up in a time where it was culturally. For the people around me it was all about style, how you dress etc. So I guess the way I looked at making paintings or just visual art in general it was very important to have your unique approach to it.

The work really has its own unique visual language. It's interesting you said that you also made music because there is a real musicality to the the shape and form of your work that draws you in. It's very enchanting.

Thank you. There is a lot of movement. My favourite paintings are the ones where it goes back and forth between just shape and colour and then you step away and see exactly what the forms are. I'm usually working with with shapes and colour and it's not so much about the people that are even in it while I'm painting it.

Can you talk about your relationship with space and colour as narrative tools in your work?

On one level colours correlate with different emotions, so I can use colours to manipulate the mood of a painting. Things can feel

more intense or calmer, the same goes for light. I'm interested in how these things direct a mood as well as just trying to make something beautiful and novel. I just want the work to be interesting, to grab your attention for a certain period of time and make you feel inspired and happy to be alive. I go on walks in my neighborhood, my kids, and I just love looking at people's flowers and trees, you know? I think beauty is really important, and I think it's one of the main ways we get pleasure in life. So hopefully I can create some beautiful objects that aren't superficial, because the whole time I'm making them I'm thinking about so many things and existing as a person. There's always meaning within the work, but for the most part don't you think it's really hard to perfectly communicate a message?

Oh yeah for sure. No matter how you intend to put something across, it's not always going to be read or understood like that, because it also sits in relation with other words, images and ultimately other experiences. Which means cultivating this sense of acceptance, letting the work go, whether it's a painting or writing or whatever. Accepting it's going to have its own life and people will have their own relationship to it beyond you. How does it feel to let go of work and put it into the world and or into a gallery situation?

I mean, you feel pretty vulnerable. A lot of times I spend a long time making a work and it's basically just the best I can do in that moment. For me now it's just about enjoying making it and once it's done, I try to separate from the work. A lot of times, paintings I made in the past, I almost can't even imagine how I made it, it feels very separate from me now.

I guess there is also the hope that they go on and do their own work in whatever context they end up in.

Exactly. Art is meant to be looked at, so it has to kind of stand alone and do something before you read about it, or you're thinking about the artist and what they were thinking about. The painting has to really do something on its own in that in that space. Best case scenario they go out of my studio, into someone else's home or museum or gallery and people get to interact with them and get all the good things that I get from like, looking at trees.

THE CURE / AESTHETĬCA