

Paul Manes: Reality

By Dale Howard



Paul Manes, *Arrnheim*, 2015, oil on canvas, 30 x 96 inches

As I prepare for my interview with Paul Manes, I get excited. Here is a man who has influenced the art world for over 30 years. Textbooks reference his work as perfect examples of aesthetic; of balance between light and dark; of the use of space. I start with small talk. I bond with the common experience of living in Colorado. His studio lies 12 miles away from I-70, the interstate I took every summer to visit my Grandparents. I give him my first question. It's the one I ask every artist: you sit down to begin your next project. What is the first thing you do? Mostly, I get answers relating to their mindset, or how they envision what they are about to create. Sometimes, I get an answer which speaks to that ultimate truth art is always trying to uncover. Paul's answer is much more pragmatic. "You get some paint and you start painting on [the canvas]." His answer takes me by surprise only because of its refreshing simplicity. I am expecting a more...philosophical answer mostly because of my past experience. But the practicality reveals the foundation of Manes' success: his grasp of the outside world. Not that he is not aware of the metaphors in his work. His fascination with bowls, such as in his work *Veronica*, is the parallel between how the painter renders the circles on canvas and the presence of both dark and light in the human soul.

They go to every edge [of the canvas], they don't stop anywhere." This matches how humans just keep continuing on like ants. But even so, Manes is more focused on the technique than the abstract meaning. "I've painted bowls for a long time. An orb is fun to paint. Then you cut it in half and make them hollow and it's ten times more fun to paint. You can stack them up and make designs in any way you want to. It fulfills my need to paint" We talk about how his work has changed over time. When we talk about his aesthetic, he says it's "a development...maybe the images devolve." But no matter how he feels about it, his work moves forward. "They are a continuation. I add things to what I do. So, if there is an aesthetic development, that's great. But if there's not, it's not going to affect what I do." For Manes, the process of creating art is not an intellectual endeavor to be pondered in the moment. "The brain just gets in the way. When I work, thinking just gets in the way. Working interferes with thinking and vice versa." Manes has the ability to separate his thoughts from his work. This allows him to move forward, to be proliferate like all successful artists, while being able to step away and allow ideas to come to him rather than struggling in the moment and wasting time.



Paul Manes, *Jammed*, 2017, oil on canvas, 48 x 104 inches

“Ideas come to me at odd times when I’m driving or reading a book.” This method of separating thinking and working means current reality can seep into his art in a way that is unobtrusive yet obviously influential. Manes describes himself as one who doesn’t follow much politics, and yet in this current political climate, it is impossible not to be at least fascinated with recent developments. He likens the new administration “like an attraction to the bazaar.” Whether in support of the new administration or not, one cannot argue the melodramatic nature of the presidency. “The readership of the New York Times has gone up, and it’s gone up because all of this stuff is bizarre.” This fascination has bled into his latest works. “I did a painting and it’s an image that I’ve used before, it’s just a stack of logs, but the word clusterf-k comes to mind.” The images he has created is not of perfectly aligned logs organized into a controllable wall, but a disarray of wood piled haphazardly as if they were dropped from the sky, connoting chaos and asymmetry. The paintings are just another example of how Manes represents the world: an image pragmatically influenced by reality, manifested in the focus of the artist. “Any aesthetic endeavor is something that evolves, is something that adds to itself, it’s something that builds as it goes along. It’s just a human thing, and if you want to produce art, then it multiplies itself over time.”

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