

Dan Walsh belongs to the post minimalist artistic generation, and his work is based on repeating forms that play with progressive complication or simplification. Walsh brings an architectural sensibility to his treatment of the space and background of his paintings, often treating them as if they were architectural friezes. His main references can be found in works from artists such as Peter Halley, Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt and Philip Guston, while his use of repetitive prints laid out in hierarchical compositions is indebted to sources as diverse as Tibetan mandalas, indigenous textiles and folk art.

For Walsh, the creative process is fascinating and it is in fact as important as the final result of the work. It is this same process which generates the images of his paintings and which, as he himself acknowledges, provides unexpected results. He knows perfectly well how his work will start but he does not know how and when it will end, so that the final result is unknown. Walsh himself states that his painting is a vehicle to contemplate a place where the retinal meets the symbolic.

Dan Walsh (Philadelphia, US, 1960) studied at the Philadelphia College of Art and at the Hunter College in New York, where he currently lives and works. His work has been exhibited at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island, the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (US), the Centre National d'Art Contemporain in Nice, the Denme Synagogue (France), the CCNOA (Art + Architecture) Centre in Brussels (Belgium) and the Kunstverein Medienturm in Graz (Austria). In addition, Walsh has made numerous artist's books that have been exhibited at the Cabinet des Estampes at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva (Switzerland).

His work has been included at the Biennial in Ljubljana (Slovenia) and the Biennial in Lyon (France). Between 17 March and 26 May 2013, the artist will have a retrospective exhibition at the Fondation Speestra in Apples (Switzerland), under the title of Table of contents

Uta Barth interview by George Stolz. May 2012

GEORGE STOLZ: I want to ask you first about how you work -- your routine, not your work as object. How do you work?

DAN WALSH: I always say that the painting I am working on now was taken from my last painting. I famously don't do drawings and it's not out of any great principle. I'd rather just see it on the canvas.

How do I work? What you wouldn't know about me is that I'm not exactly a brush fetishist, but I have a major commitment to my brushes. My ability with the brushes is key to how these paintings look.

How did I end up painting like this, with these little elemental kind of building blocks? How that happened is because years ago I was so – not embarrassed but I was really kind of feeling awkward about how I can put the paint on canvas. Everyone, every painter likes put paint on canvas, but there was this time – and we're talking about the 80s or earlier – when everyone was living under the guise or the theater of another movement, like abstract expressionism. You had to adjust somebody else's gesture. No authorship, no authority.

I can accept that, but it's not particularly something I wanted. It just didn't feel right. I'd rather be earnest and a little bit clumsy and get it right and at least say, not necessarily that I did it, but that I didn't have to go through someone else's theater to do it, to tape it out. Peter Halle would be the model of the time, to either tape it out or use a certain kind of gesture.

So my joke early on about how to describe myself was "Phillp Guston paints an Agnes Martin." A kind of a clumsy, flat-footedness, although looking at more transcendental subjects. So what do I do in a studio? I make small movements, discreet movements, and perfect movements, and I build a painting that way. They are very simple gestures. You could say I am marking time. That I am existing gracefully. But I do like to do a pass over painting, as a printmaker would.

GS: Do you make prints?

DW: Yes, I make prints with Pace. I love printmaking and I like being around someone as inspiring as Joe Watanabe. I like the way he does things. I feel like we are kindred spirits in that way. There is a way of painting that is very much about the elemental, step-by-step methodological commitment. Whereas color for me is exactly the opposite. I am hiding under a very methodological approach and what many would say is programmatic. But what I am getting out of color is I think quite romantic and quite exploratory compared to the brush marks themselves. It's how much transparency I use and the color combinations and the -- I don't want to say quirky color but I have been in some very unusual situations color-wise. And I think because of transparency and the formats I can get away with with certain kind of color situations that I would bet that a lot of other artists can't handle. It's because of my knitting, because of my process. I think that's important to separate these two.

GS: I've seen you refer in an interview to aspiring 'to exist in the middle of history and be stout.' What do you mean by that, 'to be stout'?

DW: It's that you ate at the table, you digested history. Think about Guston again. You represent with responsibility -- and now that's a very complex subject too. In history. You don't have to prove anything. You are there gracefully and strong and you understand what you choose to do and not to do. I choose to be more of the decorative color painter as opposed to being some kind of brooding Marxist. I choose that. It's a matter of choices. And grace, certainly.

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