

**Imagery and Ideas: Noah Becker Interviews Painter Wendell Gladstone**



*Artist Wendell Gladstone in his studio.*

**By NOAH BECKER, MAR. 2017**

Wendell Gladstone interrogates the hierarchical struggle among a cast of characters as they cycle through chronicles of rapture, unrest, and revolt. With source material ranging from historical European satirical cartoons to Aztec stone carvings, his paintings survey the boundless energy of the human psyche. With a bright, often candy-colored palette layered with transparent mediums that subtly reveal the forms beneath, his works immediately seduce the viewer and only later reveal psychologically charged subtexts.

Wendell Gladstone (b. 1972, Boston. Lives and works in Los Angeles) received his BA at Brown University, an MFA in Painting at Claremont Graduate University, and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He has exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions, including at Kravets/Wehby, New York and Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, and at the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art. Select museum group exhibitions include The Kemper Museum, The Hammer, San Antonio Museum of Art, Nassau County Museum of Art, Torrance Art Museum, Las Vegas Art Museum, and the Chelsea Art Museum.

Noah Becker: How do you develop your images? They are multi-layered, complex compositions.

Wendell Gladstone: I'm always mining for imagery and ideas that might spark me in some way. I try to stay open and absorb while looking at a lot of stuff. The ideas that jump out to me get jotted down into lists and then I do quick drawings of the more interesting ones that are speaking to me. At a certain point I start to see relationships and dialogues between some of the sketches and I bring them into Photoshop where I do more drawing and messing around with composition. The final step is to paint the computer sketches and with that comes a whole other round of manipulations and exploration. Sometimes it's a quick path through those stages and the final painting ends up being very focused, other times it's a longer process with a more dense and complicated outcome.



Above the Fray, Under the Weather, 72" x 42", acrylic on canvas, 2017

NB: Dog person or cat person?

WG: I'm 100% a cat person. Growing up we had three cats and a dog. I've always had a bond with cats, though. I have two brothers right now who are both going on 17 years old and they're awesome. One of them is the focal point in a recent painting of mine.

NB: When artists are sports fans, do you find that appealing? Are you into sports?

WG: Henry Taylor and Matthew Barney come to mind as artists that I like who use a lot of sports imagery in their work. I don't know if they are big sports fans, though. They're interests seem to be more in the social and political aspects of athletics. Personally, do like sports, but it's not something that has seeped into my own art. It's more of a passive activity that I do to relax, like petting my cats.



Feel To the Flame, 78" x 66", acrylic on canvas, 2015



Banished, 84" x 66", acrylic on canvas, 2015

NB: What artist, living or dead, have you learned most from?

WG: That's tough to nail down the most influential. I've picked up stuff from different artists at different stages in my life. Earlier on, I was into more contemporary artists. I was heavily influenced by Barney and how he constructed narrative in his work. The way he pulled from disparate sources and wove together his stories really opened things up for me. I also really liked Katharina Fritsch and the way she used a lot of modular and multiple elements to construct large objects. Lari Pittman was big for me early on, too. I loved his super dense lacy compositions and flat hard-edged approach. Lately I've been gravitating to older artists like Picabia and Ensor. Their influence isn't as visibly apparent in my work. It's more of general vibe and emotion that I'm connecting with.

NB: Star Wars movies - do you watch them?

WG: I watched them as a kid. Can't say that I'm a big fan. I'm drawn more to fantasy than pure SciFi. Directors like Jodorowsky, Argento and Cronenberg are favorites.

NB: Coffee or tea?

WG: No caffeine at all. It doesn't work well with body. I'm hyper sensitive to it for some reason.

NB: How do you find consistency when painting a series or do you work in a similar mode most of the time?



Smoke Screen, 66" x 66", acrylic on canvas, 2016

WG: I used to work on a whole body simultaneously over a long period of time. I would have a main theme that would unify the works and I would bring them up all up in stages. I ended up with work that, for better or worse, was very unified aesthetically and tight conceptually. It became kind of a slog and I started to like the aspects of my stuff that were more open ended. I began working on one piece at a time and that allowed for more growth and less rigidity. I'm able to take a few things I've learned from each completed piece and then germinate the next piece with those ideas to push the next one somewhere a little different. It ends up being a healthier process for me and it's way more gratifying when I get to complete something every 2-4 weeks as opposed to a big project once a year.

NB: Would you, given the chance, punch a fascist?

WG: I'm no badass. Steve Bannon deserves to be murked, though. Maybe if we're in Florida where I could use the stand your ground law and not have to go to jail.

NB: You live in LA right? Do you like it there? Did you live in New York?

WG: Yeah, I like it a lot. I've lived here since I came out from Rhode Island to go to grad school. My initial plan was to head back east after school and live in NYC, but that never happened. I was deep in school debt and I realized what mattered most was time in the studio and New York would have been way too expensive for me to achieve that. Once I graduated I found a part time job that gave me half of the week in the studio and covered the basics and I just got to it and stayed.

NB: Plans for the future? Shows coming up?

WG: Right now I'm working on the final of four pieces that will be in a two-person booth at the Brussels Art Fair in late April. After that I'll be working on a piece for a group show in London and then full focus on a solo in Los Angeles in early 2018 at Shulamit Nazarian gallery. **WM**