

Jameson Green

W here did you grow up? Were there artists in your family or surroundings?

I was born and raised in New Haven, Connecticut. My family were not visual artists, however many of them were musicians, most certainly creative types. My father was a carpenter and my mother a music teacher, and with that, I was raised to work with my hands.

Interview by

Éric Troncy, portrait

by Antoine Espinasseau

— How did you discover art and how did you decide to become an artist?

I never felt like it was a decision to be made. It's who I am. I was always drawing for as long as I can remember, I would draw my own

cartoon characters and comics based on the toys my brother and I would create out of pipe cleaners and soap boxes. I drew everything and for the longest, it was just something I did. It was never a thought in my mind that it could be a career until my mother got me into Aces School of Art in the 9th grade. From there I began to learn about Art history and it changed my life's trajectory and opened up my world and what was possible.

— Was painting always the evident choice?

The simple answer is no. I didn't understand it for the longest. It was the source of much grief. I can say that is still the case now. Even with all I've learned, there is still so much I don't

understand. About ten years ago is when I really took painting seriously. I made up in my mind I was going to master it. Up until that point, everything else came somewhat easily; drawing, sculpture, even the guitar (something my mother had me taking lessons for most of my childhood). Painting presented a very unique set of challenges. The sheer physicality of the material limited my control and I remember hating that. But it was also how color is so important to painting. I had a fear of really dealing with color. I'm partially color blind and early on, I saw it as a handicap, but then I made up my mind that it was not going to stop me from doing what I wanted to do. So you can say the challenge of painting captivated me.

— Have you ever considered abstract painting? What is your opinion on abstract painting?

I never gravitated toward abstract painting, although I have always admired and learned from abstract expressionists, two of my favorites being Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning. The evolution of many of those artists from the figurative into the abstract is quite remarkable. The deconstruction of the creative process of painting and then being able to isolate and then present such a moment in painting and allowing it to exist in its rawest of forms whether it be color or the momentous action of the physicality of paint, is very potent. Studying those guys very closely has helped me a lot in my own development as an artist. Who knows? I may dig into abstraction in the future, but for now I feel there is much more to explore in figuration and new ground to break, more than what I think people currently believe.



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— *You've studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York and at the CUNY Hunter College in New York. Was there a teacher there that has been very important for you and why?*

I have had a handful. At SVA, Ruth Marten was one of the few instructors that encouraged me to dive into my love for art history. I was in SVA for illustration at the time. This move was a half measure to appease my father because at the time, I was uncertain of how I could make money as an artist and I felt that with some commercial skills, I could still turn a profit if need be. But I was miserable in that program and felt stuck. Ruth Marten was one of the few who encouraged me to dig and recognized my talent at the time, which was big for me, because I didn't have that much support outside of my family. As for Hunter College, two standouts were Juan Sanchez and Drew Beattie. Both of them really pushed me in the studio and tested my limits as an artist. Their extensive knowledge of art history alone was insane to me. I felt like there wasn't a question they didn't know the answer to and both had very different approaches to their own work. They were both different sides of the pendulum but I felt a familiarity with both and needed the valuable input they gave.

— *Why are there in your paintings so many references to art history? Do they really need them? Wouldn't your paintings be as good without these references?*

In some ways, on a technical level, history is a tool, like paint or my brush. Think of it like sampling, some of my favorite elements from Rap Music is how it meshes together elements of other genres or musical history; it repurposes them and creates anew. Using what is familiar to us all, I believe, puts the artist in a unique position to take advantage of a direct line to the consciousness of the viewer. You bypass the natural defenses the viewer would have if they were confronted with something seemingly completely "new" even in the viewer's skepticism.

If done well, the image evokes a feeling that really can't be ignored. A conversation then has to be had and that's an ideal space for the artist to be in because now, I can really introduce a new idea.

More importantly, however, on a philosophical level, I believe it more accurately depicts human life. We do not live separately from history, it lives in us and through us, as it does in my work or anyone else's for that matter. You cannot paint on an island. You are a part of a dialogue, a conversation that is bigger than you and anyone else who is to come after you. This story doesn't begin and end with you. The references in my work are deeper than what you may see at first glance. They are integral to the process, whether I want them to be or not. History is integral to all artists and you can see influences in everyone's work. So no, these works wouldn't even exist without these "references."

— *What does it mean to you to quote simultaneously Joseph Christian Leyendecker (who was an illustrator in the 19th century) and Pablo Picasso?*

Some of the first artists I ever knew of were the great illustrators like Norman Rockwell, J.C. Leyendecker and Maxfield Parrish. They, like many of my favorite comic artists (R. Crumb, John Higgins and Brian Bolland), are all draftsmen, like Picasso, Modigliani and Klimt. In my mind, they all exist together since I feel they all have come to such a command of line and have used it to their advantage in their work. Great draftsmanship is great draftsmanship! This is why I find commonalities with Franz Kline and de Kooning. Like Paul Klee, they deeply understood the language of line. Leyendecker's understanding of line transcended the pencil and translated effortlessly into the brush, like Picasso or Raphael, and, prayerfully, one day, myself.

— *As a viewer, there seems to be in your painting some sort of Picasso and Guston obsession. Is this right and why?*



White walls are boring.

An obsession with art history, yes! I can't say specifically Guston or Picasso; on second thoughts, maybe Picasso. But if you look closely, you will find many, maybe too many, to name. But what's interesting is that people say Guston and I say Robert Crumb or old 1940's animation. Neither one of us is wrong. I also see Francis Newton Souza (God, I love his work!) Vincent Van Gogh, Dana Schutz, Max Beckman, Egon Schiele, Michelangelo, and Goya just to name a few. Not to mention the influence of Greek Pottery, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and or African sculpture. Nonetheless, you are certainly right on an obsession. I spend a lot of time studying the ins-and-outs of these artists.

— *The walls were black for your show with Almine Rech in London (September 2022), dark blue for your show with Sorry We're Closed in Brussels (May 2022), and brown for your shows with Derek Eller in New York (in 2021 and 2022). Why do you think your paintings need a colored background?*

Need? They don't need it but they certainly pop when on them. White walls are boring.

— *Do you feel success came to you quickly?*

No. I honestly can't say I think about it much. Don't get me wrong, I'm very grateful for the success. It has made my life easier in many ways. But it hasn't changed my mission in the studio. That part of my life has been the same since before the attention and will be the same after. So whether or not it came now or 30 years from now makes very little difference to me. I'm a painter first and foremost.

— *You are 30 and some of your paintings have sold for a price higher than the price of a new painting by Peter Halley, who's 70, has been around for decades, and whose contribution to the history of painting is major. Isn't this frightening for you?*

Not frightening, no. What the market does and how it chooses to move isn't in my control or something I can explain. I'm a firm believer that time is the determining factor to the longevity and success of an artist. What the market decides is successful now may not be what stands the test of time even 50 years from now. This test of time is the judge both Peter Halley and myself must face in the end.

p.138: exhibition view, Jameson Green, "Mud Made Monsters", Sorry We're Closed, Brussels, 2022. Courtesy Sorry We're Closed.
p.140: Jameson Green, "Principles of Expectation" (2022) (detail). Oil on linen, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy Almine Rech.
p.141: Jameson Green, "Don't Feel It, It Will Come Back" (2022) (detail). Oil on linen, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy Almine Rech.
p.143: exhibition view, "Jameson Green", Almine Rech, London, 2022. Courtesy Almine Rech.

