

Mike



Chattem

Probing our nation's mundane, vibrant and capital fueled psyche

What are your favorite recent trends in Southern California Contemporary Art?

My favorite thing about Southern California Contemporary Art is the embrace of individuality. The city has a rich history of sub cultural expression and idiosyncratic assertion permeates the cultural landscape. You can see this among the many artist run spaces in the city and the grassroots-feeling communities that make them up.

How does being a Southern California artist define you and your work?

I moved here in 2016 after growing up on the East coast and living in the Midwest for ten years. LA has been the most generative and inspiring place for my practice. The city has a boundless eccentricity that, paired with the space afforded by its monstrous sprawl, creates a place seemingly with no limits. Stunning natural beauty, unique micro climates and Tinsel-town's omnipresent veneer of make-believe add to this place's one of a kind presence. Every facet of the city is built upon unique vision and I've been embracing and pushing my work to reflect that.



Who is your favorite Southern California Artist of all time and why?

My favorite Southern California artist is Jim Shaw. I've been a fan of the Destroy All Monsters artists since learning about them in college, but seeing his retrospective at the New Museum in 2015 had me floored. He has such a direct and expansive vocabulary in his work that feels all his own while at the same time culturally encompassing. Private and societal concepts merge in surprising ways and his prolific output is humbling, to say the least. Fun, weird, smart and awesome; truly inspiring.



What inspires you artistically? (Other artists, poetry literature, places, feelings etc.)

The wonder of being, the miracle of cognizance and the theater of human society. The vast network of other artists living and showing in the city. There's no shortage of things to do or see in LA, from complete despair to the ostentatious luxury and indulgence; it's all very curious and intriguing.

Have you always worked in your medium, if not briefly explain your artistic journey?

I'm a drawer at heart but have always loved exploring and challenging my artistic predilections. I played in experimental bands for ten years and when

I decided to go all in on visual art I couldn't limit myself to one category. This led my work to adapting relief elements and more spatial considerations. I now work in an interdisciplinary space between drawing, painting and sculpture.

Please briefly explain your process?

I bounce back and forth between working with industrial materials to sculpt and traditional media to paint and draw. I build chunky composites of maquette style landscapes and dimensional painting gestures by layering sheets of cut and shaped polystyrene on panel and painting into with acrylic. I make colored pencil drawings to mount into the works and sculptural appendages out of foams and resins. Sometimes ready-made objects like keychains or chicken nuggets are incorporated. The final pieces become gardens of process and material, homogenized into new relics through a round-about journey of labor and intention.

What do you think the role of the artist is in our modern world?

It's hard to say, I think it could be many things. Culture is the height of our civilization, it's what we do when all other needs are met and we're free to dwell and play, reflect and refine. But contexts and power dynamics are different for everyone and always changing. I think it's up to each individual artist to reconcile this for themselves and define what it is they need to contribute to the community they're in.

Images:

1. Acid Brunch
 2. Odyssey
 3. Spectral Presence Momentum
 4. Portrait of Mike Chattem
- Images Courtesy of the Artist

