

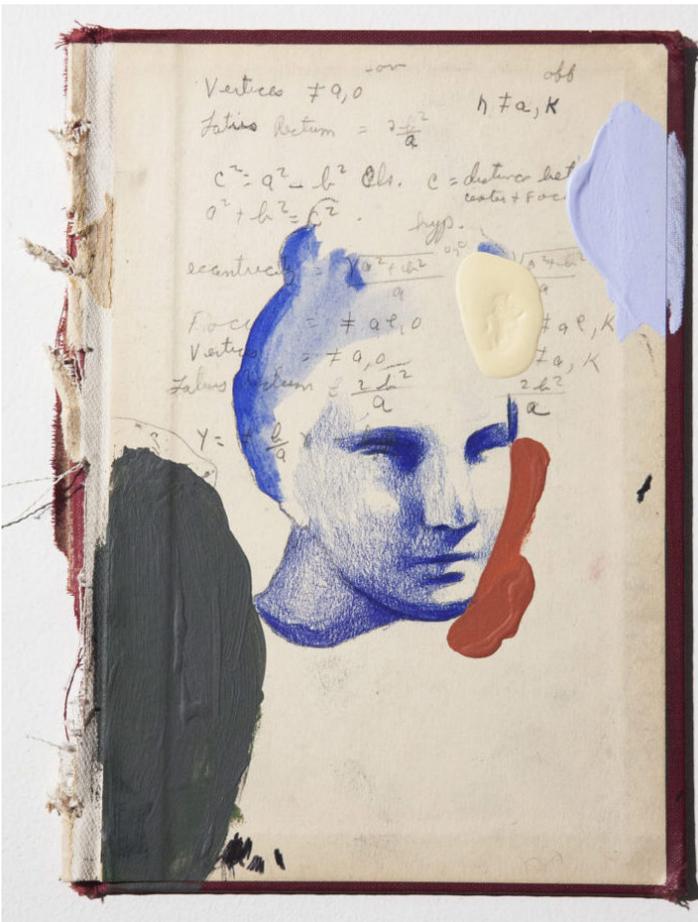


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ART MAZE Mag

The Mystery That Keeps People Hanging On.

Studio Visit With Caleb Hahne



Caleb Hahne graduated from Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design in 2014 and currently lives and works in Colorado. He was an artist in residence at ShowPen in Denver from September 2013 to August 2014. His art has been included in multiple solo and group exhibitions in Denver, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Montreal, Berlin, and the United Kingdom and most recently at MCA Denver as well as the New Museum NY in collaboration with

Adidas. Hahne has been featured in Juxtapoz, Hi-Fructose, and Booooooom.com. Denver Westword named Hahne one of the 100 Colorado Creatives of 2014 and one of the Top 10 Artists to watch in 2015. He is also listed as one of the top 10 contemporary artists under 40 by WideWalls.

We are absolutely mesmerised by Hahne's work and how he constructs his pieces, leaving so many empty pictorial spaces along with detailed objects scattered on the canvas. Read on to find out how Caleb nourishes the vision for his work, and to get an insight into what he's currently working on.

AMM: Hi Caleb, tell us what led you into the world of art and when was the first time you discovered your artistic abilities?

CH: I always knew I wanted to make things, and I remember seeing this big Dali book in my dad's kitchen and thinking to myself "I wanna do this". I think it took someone to tell me that I was good at drawing before I realized it in myself, and that didn't happen until I was a junior in high school art class.

AMM: What is your educational background and how has it influenced your own approach in making art?

CH: I received my BFA about two years ago and one of the things that I learned early on in school was that it's just as important to figure out what you want to do, as it is to figure out what you don't want to do. I studied illustration and had a hard time with it because of how trite I found the program.



CH: I had some cool professors but felt a lack of nourishment in my practice. I wanted to be a painter, but I didn't know what that meant and I remember having a painting professor that I used to bump heads with pretty often, try to drill me with painting theory and why I should and should not paint this way or that way, and it made me hate painting. In the best way though, he really forced me into a position that made me navigate through art school in a way that could best suit me and push against the grain. I also think a part of me likes to push against people's comfort levels.

AMM: How would you describe the subject matter of your work and what is the most important thing the viewer should take away?

CH: I really love the potential of narrative in a painting and the mystery that happens. Looking at a painting and trying to understand the environment or the conversation that happens between objects really drives me and what I aim to achieve. The hard thing about making art is that once you make something and put it out there, for everyone to judge, your intention doesn't necessarily exist anymore, so I try to separate myself a little bit from what I hope people can walk away with after looking at something.

...I'll try to refrain from giving away too much information, because the mystery is what keeps people hanging on.

-Caleb Hahne



AMM: Although most of your paintings seem to take inspiration from the old masters' works, your art seems, in part, to be a way for you to understand your own history; would you say your work in any way reveals your personal story?

CH: I think there's always a bit of someone's history in their work. For me, the sculptures have always, in a way, been used as relics for my religious upbringing. There's a lot of things I'm exploring when using those subjects as the vehicle for my intention, but in terms of my personal story, I remember seeing a lot of renaissance painting and sculpture as a kid and thinking of that as the canon of "art". When I use them in that context, I like thinking of it as this funny mirror, of art reflecting on itself.

AMM: In your work you mix a lot of techniques. How many mediums are you working with and what is the inspiration behind the use of all the materials?

CH: When I'm making things, a lot of my initial decision making comes out of curiosity. I talk about the potential of narrative through symbolism in my most recent body of work, and I feel like symbolism is beyond semiotics in these paintings. What happens when you paint a rendered figure next to a gestural painting of hands? How do the two impact one another? How do they act individually? They are all unique parts of a story that exist in their own space, but are also impacted by modifiers. I like thinking about them like a game of Clue.



AMM: Your works combine airy pictorial spaces with patches of very detailed drawings and paintings partially revealing the mesmerizing mysterious character/idea. How do you construct the space in your paintings and how do you know the work is finished?

CH: A lot of the objects I pick work as tools to strengthen the narrative of other objects or to create a legend for the viewer. I like to question what is there, as much as what isn't there. Sometimes looking at a painting makes you question what you're missing and what information can be filled in. I'll try to refrain from giving away too much information, because the mystery is what keeps people hanging on. I remember a John Baldessari interview where he was talking about how a good mystery novel author would never give away the most important clues at the beginning of the book, but would throw you a lot of false clues in order to keep you guessing. In a lot of ways I have extrapolated this process into my own.



AMM: Really well said about the 'mystery which keeps people hanging on' and thanks for sharing this idea with us! Tell us about your studio. How do you arrange the space and make it work for you? How often are you in the studio?

CH: I'm usually in my studio 6 days a week. It's hard for me to be away and take breaks because painting and drawing is such a normal part of my life, it's the way that I operate, so when I'm not making things, I feel a little lost, like I don't know what to do with myself. But what I love about being away from the studio is taking that time to embrace those feelings of desire which makes my time in the studio so much more intimate and valuable. Also, I just love sitting at my desk and watching soccer or boxing and just spending that time with myself.

AMM: What would be your advice to recent graduates who are just starting off with their careers and trying to adjust their vision and concept in order to take it to another level?

CH: I feel like it takes obsession in order to pursue this career. If being in the studio is a chore, then this isn't for you and if making things is a hobby, that's fine, but let it just be a hobby.

AMM: Do you pay attention to the work of your contemporaries? If so, is there anyone in particular you feel inspired by and you'd like to meet in person?

CH: Oh yeah, I think it's important to be aware of what other people are making. I have spent a lot of time looking at works by Sayre Gomez, Aidan Koch, David Hockney, Riccardo Baruzzi, Wolfgang Tillmans, Frank Ocean, Tomoo Gokita, Carlota Guerrero, Jenny Morgan. Just to name a few.

AMM: What is your motto, perhaps a piece of advice or a quote which helps you during creative blocks or just in every day life?

CH: Remain present and persistent.

AMM: You've participated in the group show 'Spectators' at Athen B Gallery. How has the experience been and how long did it take you to prepare for this exhibition? What are your goals for your future works?

CH: It was the challenge I needed. It's always difficult trying to make three artists belong to a space cohesively without one overpowering another, and I felt like we all worked really well together to make that happen. There were a lot of really long days playing with the placement and arrangement of the works, in order to create a narrative of sorts. I spent about 6 months preparing for this show and went through a lot of good and bad ideas. When I'm getting ready for a show I try to give myself a lot of room to experiment and make a lot of bad painting; this helps me understand what's working, what I can abandon or what is still worth exploring. One thing that I run into after every show is my desire to start a new idea, which is a positive and a negative. I'm really happy with this most recent body of work and I think I should spend some more time thinking and writing about what I'm trying to do and see how far I can push these ideas.

