

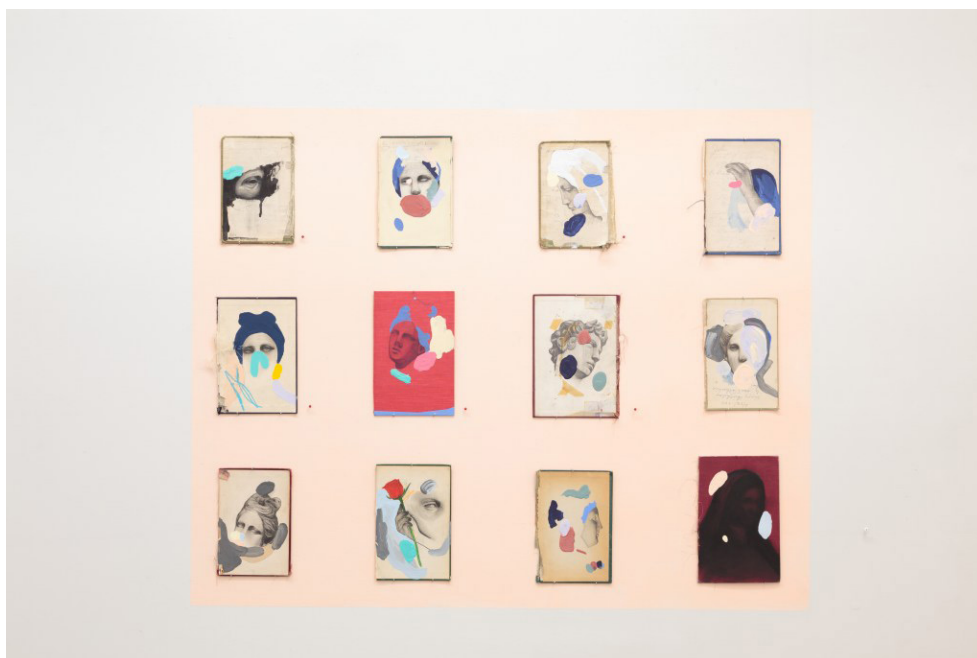


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THE DENVER POST

The next generation of Colorado artists might look a lot like this guy

by Ray Mark Rinaldi, April 21, 2016



Caleb Hahne paints and draws on vintage book jackets in “Beyond the Veil” at Rule Gallery

This is exactly where you want to meet Caleb Hahne: At 23, on the occasion of his first serious painting show, at the point of his career where you can still watch him grow as an artist but before his stuff sells for more than you can afford.

That’s not to say his current exhibit at Rule Gallery isn’t ready for prime-time. The dozen or so works on display — somewhere between figurative drawings and abstract color field paintings — are right at home at Rule, an important, regional tastemaker for a quarter-century now.

But the work is clearly young, or “fresh” as Rule’s Valerie Santerli labels it in the way a gallery director will. There’s an earnest, drawing-class quality to the way he presents female forms, but also a free sense of experimentation that comes from being at a place in life when there’s nothing to lose.

Hahne works in the cheap materials of youth — acrylic and graphite, but also latex house paint, wood panels and old book covers — and he’s liberal in the way he pushes his figures into a mysterious place by adding blobs of pure color and leaving the occasional, careless drip. He offers readable, representational images — human figures or renderings of classical statues — then obscures the facts by layering on crude, incoherent marks.

The pieces tell complicated, personal stories he insists; they capture incomplete memories, and we can see them coming together in his brain. There are faces without eyes or mouths, and the lines around his torsos can simply drop out, leaving the viewer to complete the picture. The paintings are jigsaw puzzles with a few pieces missing.

No doubt, Hahne's painting will evolve. Artists remain a work-in-progress their whole lives, and Hahne has some living yet to do. There are overly deliberate elements to his drawings left over from art school and some sentimental litter — forlorn facial expressions or in one case, a rose — that might be cleaned out. Hopefully, he'll stick around the area so we can watch that happen.

That's the sense you get looking at Hahne's work, an appreciation for how good it is and optimism for the next phase. If you know a little more about his back story, you see hints of where the next generation of successful Colorado artists might come from, where they can go and how they'll get there.

In Hahne's case, that's working-class Aurora, where he grew up, and not the affluent suburbs. His first efforts to make art came in the form of graffiti splashed around a not-so-safe neighborhood. Hahne has moved on, but there's a street art spontaneity that informs his work and makes it relevant, while not being too precious.

His transformation to fine artist was inspired by a variety of influences, starting with public school teachers who recognized his drawing talent and urged him on. His higher education came locally as well, at the Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, where he got his bachelor's degree in 2014.

But he also has found encouragement in other places. He recently was picked by the Adidas shoe company to join other young artists for shows in New York and

L.A. He was paid with a pair of sneakers but also got to travel a bit and connected with peers and potential buyers.

Now, he's got Rule on his side. The gallery, started by the late Robin Rule and now run by her former in-house colleagues, has a long history of recognizing promising artists early on and supporting their careers via a loyal client base. Rule Gallery's stable is broad, ranging from newcomer Hahne to 70-something Colorado painting legend Clark Richert.

There's little in common between the exacting geometric patterns Richert is known for and Hahne's dreamy enigmas, but you see in both artists' careers how a gallery, and a city, can nourish talent.



Rule Gallery is hosting Caleb Hahne's first major painting exhibit.

BEYOND THE VEIL Rule Gallery presents a show of Caleb Hahne's recent work. Through May 14. 3254 Walnut St. Free. 303-800-6776 or rulegallery.com