

ARTNEWS

'I'm Less of a de Kooning and More Like Lichtenstein': A Talk with Jonas Wood

BY *Bill Powers* POSTED 01/06/15



Jonas Wood.
GAEA WOODS

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Jonas Wood's show at David Kordansky closes January 10. Later this month he will show with Shio Kusaka at Gagosian Hong Kong. He has a solo exhibition at Gagosian London next fall.

Bill Powers: How did you get your start in Los Angeles?

Jonas Wood: My wife [Shio Kusaka] and I decided to move to L.A. in 2003. I had gone to high school with Matt Johnson who offered me a job working for him. While we were driving out, he set up a gig for Shio assisting Charles Ray. A couple of months later, Laura Owens called Matt looking for a studio assistant, so I went to help her for two years until she had a kid, and then I actually worked for Matt again another year and a half before my first solo show in 2006.

BP: Your recent exhibition at David Kordansky in L.A. featured what you call landscape pots?

JW: Yes, paintings of clipped plants in pots with pictures of shaped landscapes on them. I also had two still-life paintings in that show, plus another room of portraits and a big wall of drawings from 2007 until now.

BP: There's one still-life painting that reminded me of the shelves you have outside your studio in L.A. I heard a rumor that Ed Ruscha is your landlord?

JW: It's true. He owns the building where I've had my studio for the last seven years. Ruscha never used it as his studio though—storage mostly. And I think it was a back-up plan if he ever got evicted from his old spot in Venice Beach, which ended up happening anyway. We're friendly, but I try not to super-fan-out on him. Plus he gave me a great deal on the building.

BP: Is it hard to share a studio with your wife?

JW: When we first moved to California, we lived on the second floor of a pretty big house in Echo Park. It was a disaster. In retrospect, I think we both needed to figure out who we were as artists on our own before we could handle it.

BP: Were you jealous at all when she was included in the last Whitney Biennial?

JW: The funny thing is that they came to visit both of us. I never thought they were really interested in me. And part of me felt that if we were both in the biennial, it could take away from each other. I love promoting my wife's work. I'm very into her doing well. In fact, sometimes she has to tell me to chill out. Shio is much more reserved.

BP: Are Lucien Freud's plant paintings an influence? Or David Hockney's pool paintings? Or Alex Katz's portraits?

JW: All three of them are superheroes. If I had to make a power ranking I'd list: Hockney, Katz, Freud.

BP: Mark Grotjahn said that sometimes when he's struggling with a painting he'll add a little white to it, and that cleans everything up. What's your rescue plan?

JW: I look to drawing first. I'll take a picture of the painting and print it out on drawing paper, get the colored pencils and try to figure some shit out. I'm less of a de Kooning and more like Lichtenstein so it's a compositional decision, I guess.

2021 S WABASH AVE
CHICAGO IL 60616
+1 (312) 226 2223

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BP: Having incorporated older artists' work into your own—I'm thinking here of, say, the pot painting you made with the Matisse interior—did it make you think about those painters in a different light?

JW: It's more a reflection of having grown up with some of their work. My parents had a couple of Matisse prints from the cutout series, one with lots of hearts on it. I grew up with the green-and-pink Warhol cow wallpaper in our hallway. And my grandfather had a serious art collection: a big Bacon painting, a Lichtenstein, Calder, Rauschenberg.

BP: And does the impact of that exposure at an early age inform your paintings in other ways?

JW: There's a painting of my dad in the Kordansky show and he's sitting in my grandfather's Modernist house after my grandfather passed away. My grandfather built this crazy house in 1955 in upstate New York and filled it with his art collection. He was an interesting guy: a self-made man, a doctor. He taught himself how to paint at age 60. When I was younger, I thought maybe I'd follow in his footsteps.

BP: In a recent interview, Cady Noland was quoted saying that "Gagosian is where artists go to die." As someone with two Gagosian shows lined up for 2015, how does that resonate with you?

JW: That's her opinion. I'm going to Gagosian to live. I have friends who show there. It all came about very organically.

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