

ART REVIEW CITY

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"Sam Jackson"
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Sam Jackson

A Artist Q&A with Sam Jackson

Sam Jackson's approach to painting, digital media, and print combines subject matter that defies straightforward interpretation. The process of exploring how originality is captured and the aesthetics of its significance is a central theme of his practice. The do-it-yourself attitudes, homemade and amateur painting techniques, fantasy, excess, youth culture, violence, Baroque and Renaissance painting are all part of Jackson's oeuvre. These urgencies are embedded in the painting's application, growing into portraits or figures hewn with textual recalls. Medium and message are both extrapolated as a ground for further discoveries in painting, whereby paint is applied, translated, and governed by an intensity of appearance and reference. Mainstream culture, encouraged by evermore open media coverage, its absorption into high street fashion, investigations into compositional harmony, atmosphere, and the handling of paint, the ancient and the modern are strategized hybridity that are collective meditations on how contemporary painting is an oscillation between the textual and the symbolically real.

Who is your favorite artist of all time?

Caravaggio, I have always been fascinated by the use of the spiritual, religious, and subversion coming together in an emotional drama on the canvass.

How did you become a professional artist?

I was fascinated by art and painting from a young age. I was taken to a Lucien Freud exhibition aged nine and found the images fascinating and odd. Somehow, I could see that in painting, you could express something beyond words that were emotional in some way and really made me want to be an artist. So, after graduating from the Royal Academy for my postgraduate studies in 2003, I was picked up and started my ongoing relationship and representation with Charlie Smith London Gallery.

What are the influences and inspirations in your work?

A comprehensive, disparate range of influences inform my practice, from music and lyrics to literature and, of course, other painters. Bands such as The Smiths, Joy Division, and the Doors, linked with that of rap and grime – Wu-Tang Clan, Wiley, ASAP Rocky, and Bugzy Malone. Within literature, I am drawn to the poetry of Rimbaud, the writings of De Sade, and the works of Comte de Lautreamont and Aldous Huxley's essays and novels.



How is your work different than everything else out there?

I try to subvert/ignite/illuminate/transgress the life of the figure, the portrait, or cipher, setting it apart from the outer view so that both painting and the viewer can explore the inner life and the internal world and bring forth a more internal dialogue that is open to various questions and thoughts from the audience. In essence, they are both of this time now in the contemporary world and its history and its future.

When is a piece finished for you?

When I feel the level of paint can no longer transmit any more power. That simplicity and mark-making combine, creating that intensity and power.

What's different about your current body of work?

I am returning to a more complex application that's rougher and more brutal in technique with the paint sparser, where the figures are linked more to a specific attitude, a more erotic bodily element within my practice.

What would you like collectors and curators to know about your work?

That every piece has a life, a moment, and history woven into it. The paintings translate a resonance. Graham Crowley wrote in his essay on my work from 2019 'The Density of Life' "Whenever I reflect on Sam Jackson's work, there's something insoluble, strange to say, I'm never quite sure if I've dreamt them."

Tell us about a few of your career highlights or moments that have greatly affected your career.

Meeting Zavier Ellis, director of Charlie Smith London.

My first solo show at Charlie Smith London, Vas Deferens, in 2009. I felt I really established my language within my practice. Also, I was very honored to be given the opportunity to have a solo show in London.

An art fair we did at David Zwirner Gallery New York, Plan B, 2019, and the group show *The Future Can Wait*, 2007/10.

What's coming up for you?

I will participate in a group exhibit at Galerie Heike Strelow this summer and have an upcoming retrospective at Giant Space.

What advice would you give to an artist just starting out today?

Don't give up; keep on painting and stay focused on what gets you inspired and motivated, be it political, social, sexual, or ethical. Question the language of painting, and don't follow, do what you want to do.

Who are some of your favorite underappreciated artists that you don't think get enough attention?

Sarah Jene Hender, my partner, so I'm biased, but for 20 years, she has worked in sculpture, video, installation, and painting that is both poignant and disturbing but also beautiful.

Tony Benn is a painter that is darkly comic, transgressive, and forward-thinking.

Lee Holden is a British-based installation artist that, for 20 years, has been making profound social, political, and contemporary thought-provoking work.