

ART HAPS

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INTERVIEW

Ted Gahl

BY CORYDON COWANSAGE

I first met Ted Gahl in 2009 when we were in grad school together at RISD. Back then his material approach varied significantly. One week he might make twenty small, painterly abstractions, and the next he'd be experimenting with larger ready-made objects and constructions. He worked incredibly fast, churning through ideas, and his studio was always packed with new work.

Ted's current practice is considerably pared down by comparison. His new paintings are larger and more deliberate than in the past, and primarily limited to paint on canvas. His work is embedded with disparate, often idiosyncratic references. Each painting incorporates intuitive, verging on stream-of-consciousness associations that weave together everything from art history to his mundane daily experiences. Ted's paintings are chalky, brushy and matte, and his palette is slightly muted so marks often register only faintly. The paint application is quick and direct, yet at times previous layers of color poke through hinting at information that may have already been added and subsequently removed.

The day before Thanksgiving I visited Ted's studio in Litchfield, Connecticut where he was working on new paintings that he'll include in his upcoming solo show *Sundays (Like the Brightest Light in the Theatre Shining On An Empty Stage)* at DODGE Gallery, on view January 11th through February 23rd.

Corydon Cowansage: Do you want to just start by talking a little bit about what you're working on in here?

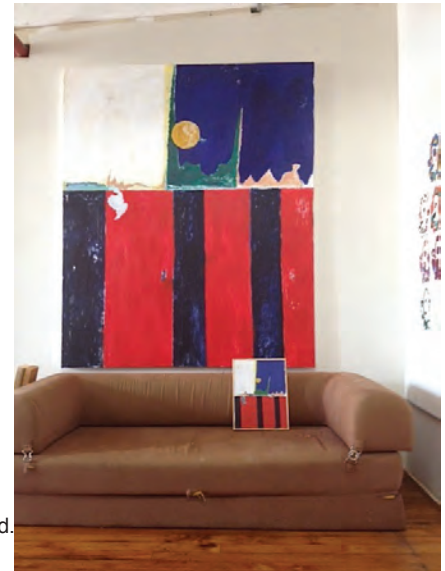


Image courtesy the Artist



Small paintings, Los Angeles, CA, 2013. Image courtesy the Artist.

Ted Gahl: I started thinking about the show while I was out in Los Angeles. I go out there and house sit, and while I'm there I make a lot of small work. I usually end up sending most of it back home. A lot of the ideas from that work have become part of the larger paintings. That's become kind of consistent, but this is the first time that the small paintings have acted as drawings and literally become larger versions.

CC: So you're actually remaking a lot of the small LA paintings—but bigger—once you get back home to Connecticut?

TG: Sure. Some are very close to the originals, others give me a direction for larger works. I pull sections from what I like, ideas that I want to see pushed further.

CC: You seem to pull a lot of different references into each piece, like you'll quote particular painters that you like or you'll stick a personal experience or anecdote in there.

TG: Yeah, I think I've always made work like that. If you look at the press release for the show at DODGE, half the release is the notes from my iPhone. That's kind of like the new pencil and paper-making a list on the run. The stuff on that list is either ideas for titles, for paintings, or for a show. I go day-to-day collecting stuff. It's funny but a lot of the ideas I get aren't while I'm painting, they're while I'm doing other things. When we were at RISD together, one thing I talked about when I was working on my thesis was the idea of transcendental meditation, where you can be doing something like raking leaves, which is this very mundane simple chore, but while you're doing it you begin to get these very intense ideas because your body has gone into a sort of autopilot mode. It's almost like dreaming or something, you're free to really let your mind roam around.

I've been lucky to be able to spend time with my family in Texas this past year and I got to see a lot of great art while I was in Houston. I finally got to see work that I've wanted to see my whole life, like the Rothko Chapel and Twombly's work at the Menil. The show down there that really blew me away was a big William Ossawa Tanner show, whose work I knew of, but I wasn't that familiar with. An entire wing of the museum was filled with hundreds of his paintings and studies.

There's a couple of paintings that have stuck with me until now, they're that good. I still think about them. I could see so much influence on current painting now, whether it was color palettes or certain motifs, but he doesn't seem to come up a lot. When I incorporate ideas from artists like him into my work it's my way of trying to make a connection with them, or even to pay homage to them. I think looking further back, there are a lot of artist's who are really important and when they're not having these big museum shows or making a catalogue that people are talking about, then people don't talk about them.