

HAMPTONS  
BEACH PATROL



Founder of Halsey McKay Gallery in East Hampton, Ryan Wallace is an artist himself.

INSIGHT

**Artist to watch:** Matt Kenny, whose work is the subject of a solo exhibition opening June 7 at Halsey McKay.

**Perks of East Hampton:** "Just walking to my studio in Brooklyn, you're so in the thick of the New York art world. Out here, you're just working."

the seriousness of it," says Wallace, whose "Omega Point" paintings are on view through June 15 in the "Dazed and Confused" group exhibition at Eric Firestone Gallery (4 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, 604-2386; [ericfirestonegallery.com](http://ericfirestonegallery.com)). "The work is both earnest and acknowledging the hubris of those kinds of ideas. At the end of the day, it's also just a painting."

If Wallace seems remarkably adept at inhabiting multiple perspectives, it is because he has had plenty of experience doing so. He studied illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design and pursued a career as an illustrator after graduation. Soon he was racking up awards while balancing a part-time design job at *Nickelodeon* magazine—but something didn't add up. "I liked problem solving and quickly making a picture, but I didn't want to do the big commercial things," says Wallace. He decided to keep the magazine job and devote the rest of his time to personal work. "I gave myself a year to just do whatever I wanted to do in my studio. And that led, very slowly, to figuring out where I fit."

A final push into the fine art world came in 2004, a few years before the first of his two children was born. He decided to rent a studio in East Hampton, where his wife, chef Casey Laytin, worked over the summers at an organic food market (today she is a private chef in the area). "I didn't have any real roots here until I had the studio," explains Wallace.

It was around that same time that he launched a second career, as codirector of an art gallery. Wallace partnered with Hilary Schaffner, who also happens to be Laytin's best friend (the three went to high school together), to launch Halsey McKay. The East Hampton gallery, which combines the maiden names of Schaffner and Wallace's respective maternal grandmothers, is notable for its roster of emerging artists, such as Joseph Hart, Colby Bird, and Rachel Foullon.

Running a gallery could make some artists cynical, but not Wallace. "It has reaffirmed for me that the most interesting work out there is original voices and that you can't tailor what you do to a commercial market," he says. "I learned a lot about rejection [as an illustrator]. It gave me a really thick skin, so that by the time I did want to enter the gallery world, I wasn't fazed by rejection—or at least I didn't take it personally." *Halsey McKay Gallery, 79 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, 604-5770; [halseymckay.com](http://halseymckay.com)* **H**

# Making a Splash

NOT ONLY DOES RYAN WALLACE REPRESENT RISING ART STARS AT HALSEY MCKAY, HIS GALLERY IN EAST HAMPTON, BUT HE'S ALSO A STANDOUT HIMSELF, WITH WORKS IN A GROUP SHOW AT ERIC FIRESTONE GALLERY. BY STEPHANIE MURG

Artist Ryan Wallace creates work that embraces both the grand theories of modern physics and the kookiest New Age concepts, using materials that range from oil paint and ink to automotive tints and scraps of other paintings. The resulting paintings, drawings, collages, and sculpture are abstract—and mesmerizing. "Turning a crazy, elegant, or spiritual idea into something that has more of a disco-pop sensibility negates

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