

Landes, Jennifer, "Ryan Wallace: Building Art Out of Byproducts," The East Hampton Star, 14 September 2017.

## THE EAST HAMPTON STAR SHINES FOR ALL

If the Environmental Protection Agency gave awards to artists, Ryan Wallace would be on the short list. He has fashioned a career out of using byproducts and remnants from his studio to inspire paintings, sculptures, and other mixed-media works of art in an infinite cycle of re-cycling.



Ryan Wallace paused next to John Riepenhoff's "Handler" while installing his tile piece "Pitch" at the Elaine de Kooning House in Northwest Woods. Below, Mr. Wallace's "Croistics" series of cast cubes was shown at the Susan Inglett Gallery in Chelsea in 2014. *Walter Weissman*

The evidence can be seen at the Elaine de Kooning House in Northwest Woods, where he has tiled the floor with the sides of the molds he uses to cast concrete and plaster cubes. "I stuff the cube with things that don't make it into my paintings," he said during a tour of the de Kooning installation and in his studio. The "waste products of one system become the building blocks of another."

He uses them as "a time capsule," and a way of letting go from his composition-based approach to painting. "There's no way to predict how they will come out," he said.

Mr. Wallace is sharing the de Kooning space with John Riepenhoff, who brought "The John Riepenhoff Experience" and "Handler" series straight from the Whitney Biennial after it closed in June. Like Mr. Wallace, who is an owner of the Halsey McKay Gallery in East Hampton, Mr. Riepenhoff also owns a gallery, in Wisconsin. The two met when they served on a panel at the Dallas Art Fair.

"The John Riepenhoff Experience" is an ironic take on the grandiose gestures and self-importance rampant in the art world. A wooden box just large enough to accommodate a hole cut out of the bottom for a head and a miniaturized work of art is hung from the ceiling, requiring a ladder to view it. At the Biennial the box was lined in mirrors, in a small version of Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Mirror Rooms," shown there previously. Here, he has showcased a small sculpture by Jerry Torre, made famous by the "Grey Gardens" documentary as the Beales' "marble faun." Mr. Torre had been working at the de Kooning house over the past few months.

"Handler" is a clothed, life-size and life-like papier-maché form of a male, from the legs up to his waist. It acts as a pedestal for a painting by another artist, in this case Mr. Wallace, who assembled 36 of his tiles into a stand-alone composition. "This is the first time the tiles have been shown as a painting," he said. With the entire floor covered by the tiles, it looks as if a group of them spontaneously jumped up to form the arrangement. It has a surreal effect, and can seem menacing, as if the tiles were taking over the space.

On the floor, there is no escaping the echoes of Carl Andre and other masters of Minimalist seriality such as Sol LeWitt, but the surface is far from pristine. There might not be a painterly "hand" in the marks on the tiles, which started out as found Plexiglas and have evolved into Masonite over time, but there is no question that the marks have something to do with the artist. Some tiles came to him that way; others bear the

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splotches and scars of their use as molds for other materials. Still more drips and spatters are collected on the floor of the studio from whatever drops on them.

Regarding them as individual pieces as well as parts of a whole, Mr. Wallace arranges them differently, depending on the space, in a multicolored patchwork. In a tiny gallery in Manhattan, he lined the walls and ceiling with them, creating an immersive environment. "It was oddly sinister. It had a hell-raiser vibe."

In his studio, he had set out a configuration for an upcoming show at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the Maine College of Art in Portland, along with several paintings he is reworking or considering for the show. "I'm pretty much a cliché," he said with a smile — "painter in the studio, sitting and staring."

The gallery — as well as his young family — is a way out of the studio and into a more collaborative way of working, typically with friends. Mr. Wallace views it as separate from his own art. "As a person, I'm interested in markets and commerce," he said. But art summons up a "different part of my personality, involved with beauty and aesthetics. I do not want the gallery to interfere with that." His sales experience, he said, has helped him realize that there is "no way of knowing when the market will react or what collectors will like." It has reinforced the notion that chasing a trend is not a good way to pursue making art.



His paintings are amalgamations. Any one of them cites a laundry list of mediums: oil, enamel, acrylic, pigment, cold wax, canvas, linen, rubber, aluminum, and fiberglass, etc. He has an indirect way of including painting in the work. He might place found material, such as dropcloths or old curtains from his house, on the floor of his studio to collect drops and splatters from work in progress on the wall, or find other ways of introducing it.

Holding up a piece of fabric streaked with various specks, he explained that "I ran gold through vinyl screens for dottiness, then folded it up so it was crumpled." He will then cut the material and incorporate it into a composition, where it might be further manipulated, painted, or coated with cold wax.

Mr. Wallace is a composite of art school (Rhode Island School of Design), erudition, and the New York City version of "D.I.Y. skate punk and zine-making culture." He said he was "never a draftsman, always a painter," but wanted a way to remove his "very specific hand." While some artists use silk-screen or photo processes to accomplish this, "I can collect marks but they can go here and there, they become arbitrary, and then I can assemble them into a painting."

Partially in the lineage of Abstract Expressionism, he sees his work not as assemblage but as paintings that buck "the dogma of medium-specificity." For artists like Clyfford Still, whose work Mr. Wallace's can sometimes resemble, "if it wasn't oil on canvas, it didn't count . . . he would hate my paintings because of that dogma." Old-school approaches may "inform them, but at end of day, I'm just trying to make an interesting object."

The Elaine de Kooning House is open by appointment. Visitors can email [contact@elainedekooning.org](mailto:contact@elainedekooning.org) or call 631-604-5882 to arrange a visit.