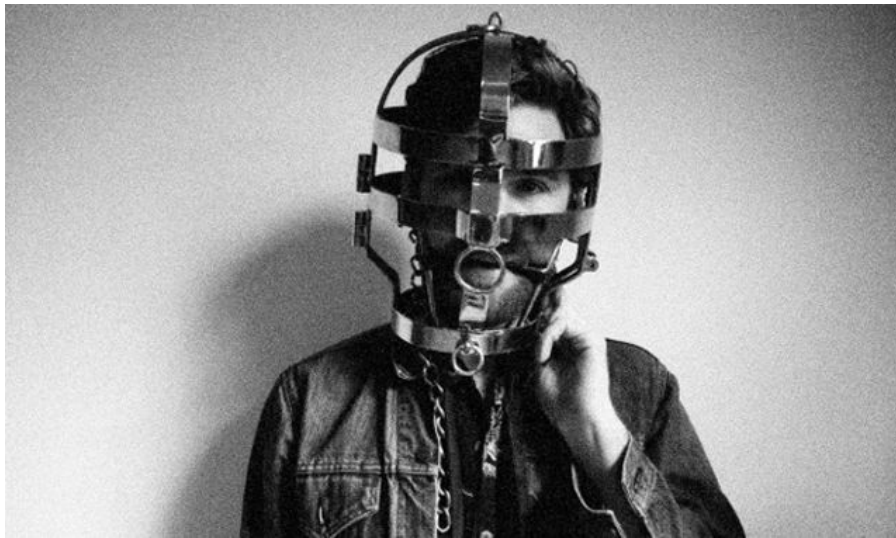


GAGOSIAN GALLERY

BLOUINARTINFO

Dan Colen Believes in Miracles

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Artist Dan Colen. (© Dan Colen/Courtesy Gagosian Gallery/ Photo by Ari Marcopoulos)

Dan Colen is feeling good. The nine large-scale canvases in “Miracle Paintings,” on view at Gagosian Gallery in New York through October 18 — all roughly based on semi-abstract stills from the 1940 Disney film “Fantasia” — are, he said, “the culmination of the last 10 years of my work.” The concise focus of the exhibition might come as a shock to anyone who visited “Poetry,” his 2010 exhibition at the gallery, which included conservator-thwarting paintings made of gum, a sculpture composed of a row of motorcycles, and a full-size skateboard half-pipe turned into a readymade. (That show wasn’t “even fun in the way that, say, a Damien Hirst show can be, as a train wreck of attention-getting desperation,” gnashed Jerry Saltz in *New York* magazine. “Colen shows not a lick of spontaneity.”) For his part, Colen said that he stands by that 2010 outing, which was a personal catalyst for many developments in his practice. And while “Miracle Paintings” speaks in a much quieter, reverent voice, it’s not like the artist has abandoned bold, what-the-fuck gestures (see his cut-in-half-truck sculpture, “At Least They Died Together (After Dash),” which was installed on the lawn at the Brant Foundation Art Study Center earlier this year).

Discussing these recent canvases, Colen frames himself as something of an equal collaborator with the oil paint he’s employing — as if he’s along for the ride, marveling at the effects and techniques that the material can conjure. “Usually my paintings are about me trying to control the paint,” he said, likely referring to his crisply detailed, highly realistic “Candle” works. “These were about me learning from the paint and seeing possibilities that are beyond me. As opposed to putting too much confidence in myself, or in an image or a scene or a set of brushes, I

really want to allow the oil paint to perform, to show me the things that it wants to do, beyond my imagination.” Hence the “miracle” of the exhibition’s title: Not a cheeky boast about the artist’s own inherent genius, but rather a nod to the alchemical twists and turns that enabled the paintings to develop over the span of a few years, layer by layer. The process of their making, as he described it, involved myriad experiments, “gallons and gallons” of oil paint, detailed calculations of the drying times of particular materials — and more than a bit of faith. “At the end of the day, you can’t have a vision, you have to have a *hope*,” Colen explained with a refreshing earnestness. “This is where the miracle comes in.”

No recognizable characters appear in any of the paintings, which would probably not be readily identified as coming from “Fantasia” if one didn’t know this was the case. Colen said that he conceives of them as landscape paintings, more or less, that are all “pictures of creation”: One he sees as a Big Bang eruption; another is a womb; another is more like a cumshot (Disney would be proud). The colors and textures include explosive rainbow arrays, a sponge-like, intense red, and ghostly blue-greys. After some initial brainstorming about sculptural installations or ways to alter the space itself — including covering the entire exterior of the gallery with a fabric “somewhere between what a magician will put over a box before the bunny rabbit disappears, and the cloth that covers Mecca” — Colen quite rightly decided to let these massive paintings work their own spell. “I don’t need people to think the art is good, but often the discussion is about other things,” Colen explained, alluding to his famously divisive mega-dealer and the flack that his stable can often encounter. “In that room I’ve created a situation where it’s impossible to talk about anything else but the art.”