

GAGOSIAN

VULTURE

Ex-Bad Boy Pastoral Dan Colen is still painting. But instead of raising hell, he's raising pigs and sheep.

Matthew Schneier



Dan Colen. Photo: Ryan Lowry

His boots sunk in pig shit, his head rising six feet six inches above them, Dan Colen, 40, is at home, a giant silhouetted against a gray Columbia County sky. Once he was young, wild, and downtown notorious: In 2007, he appeared on the cover of *New York*, spooning his also notorious best friends, the artists Dash Snow and Ryan McGinley, in what didn't appear to be a very clean bed. Snow died of a heroin overdose two years later; Colen and McGinley got sober.

In 2011, Colen bought what he named Sky High Farm. "I was at a point where I felt I needed to get out of the city," he tells me over a lunch of egg salad and greens. He keeps cows, pigs, sheep, chickens, turkeys, and a donkey called Joy and grows broccoli, lettuce, carrots, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes. There are bees; there's an orchard. The farm is set up as a nonprofit, a 501(c)3, and he donates what it produces to food banks to help those in need.



Colen's art studio at Sky High Farm. Photo: Ryan Lowry

Colen has an art studio up here too, and his new show opens at the Gagosian gallery on Park Avenue on February 26. Colen is a successful artist, one who has never stuck to a particular style. His materials over the years have included tar, feathers, grass, dirt, and chewed gum. A set of five canvases painted in oil to look like they were crapped on by pigeons sold at Phillips for \$545,000 in 2014; a painting at Christie's went for over \$3 million earlier that year.

Colen describes the charity of his new country-squiredom as having changed his life, but the farm has also influenced his work. When he was in art school, a teaching assistant told him that one's art practice comes out of whatever it is one loves. "If you like to go to raves, make art about raves," he says. "If you like to skateboard, you make it about skateboarding. If you like to get high, you make art about getting high. That's all it is. Whatever interests me is what my art is going to become about. And recently, I've kind of realized just how silly it is that I've kept this thing, the farm — which has become probably the biggest thing other than my artwork that I've put my energy into, put my money into, put my time into — out of the work. It just goes against every other thing that I do." He says the influence wasn't always direct, but then again, he points out, "the last five years of my work has been all landscape painting." His landscapes have a decidedly cartoonish cast. The new paintings, influenced by German Romanticism, have a Disneyish sweetness and naïveté. His last show, in Beverly Hills, was all desert-colored mountains and landscapes with flat-perspective tunnels that recall Wile E. Coyote.



Photo: Ryan Lowry

He has begun to sell a small line of foodstuffs and fashion items on the side. Joana Avillez doodled up some labels, and you can buy the farm's honey and strawberry jam online. And now Dover Street Market is selling the farm's tie-dyed T-shirts and hoodies bearing the logos of farm beneficiaries like the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York. ("I never thought I'd see Food Bank fashions during New York Fashion Week," marvels the organization's Joanne Dwyer.)

"I don't want to bite the hand that feeds me," Colen says, "but I have a lot of gratitude that this has come into my life and I don't just live stewing in the art world." He's grown up, but also the times have changed. "In 2001, we didn't give a fuck about farming or vegetables or green juice or health — that idea wasn't around for 20-year-olds," notes Colen. "Now it really is. I see that young people want to stand up for what they believe in. And share those ideas. And wear those ideas. And, you know, eat those ideas."



Colen in his studio. Photo: Ryan Lowry