



IN CONVERSATION

Jacob Kassay + Yuri Stone

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YS: I was thinking today—and you just jump in and correct me if you want to go in another direction—we'll talk about the works in the space exclusively, as opposed to going back and looking at previous work from Jacob—and I think there's a lot of different ways you can read the artwork that's on view—both the paintings and these—I sort of think of them as sculptural [objects]—there's a lot of different entry points to the show. For me, I think maybe the one I'd like to focus on or the avenue I'd like to take is from the architectural standpoint—like I said, thinking of the paintings more as sculptures or structures as a way to think about movement and space, and specifically this space, and Jacob's relationship to this space and these objects. Maybe the place to start would be to talk about what specifically the show is composed of. You'll probably have a pretty good understanding of that.

JK: Sure. A lot of this show has to do with knowing Todd for as long as I have. The work on the poles is stuff that I made in 2009, close to the time I met him; and at the time he asked me to do the show—which was not too long ago—I was working without a studio and I had a piece that could augment the way that the work was hung in the space which was to alter the lighting—already working with the lighting from the window, skylight, rear windows and whatnot—so I thought this ten year span was a way to kind of close that distance—you know, the title of the show being X which is just for the numeral—the ten years between the works but also a way to kind of find a centerpoint between them...a common space for them.

YS: So those are the paintings and then there's also lighting controller.

JK: Yeah, that's the new thing. The light.

YS: So the light is—actually for me, I don't know if everybody has had a chance to go to the corner to see this mechanism. There's a candle with a flame that flickers and then a motion sensor—growing up, for me, it was the night light in the bathroom that my sister and I shared, that would turn off and on if something was in front of it. So when Todd first described the show for me, I thought it was going to be this elaborate engineering feat to figure out how to have these lights react to the flame of a candle, and I was really surprised to find this super familiar and somewhat domestic night light...what is it called, is it a night light?

JK: Yeah, it's a night light. But also, I had it in the bathroom, and when we talked the other day, I said that a bathroom is an area where there's a lot going on (laughs)—there's steam, mirrors, glass, vinyl...and there's all these things informing the crude camera or eye of the night light. The quality of light matters but so does your position in the room. And as a courtesy to this work that was made so long ago (gestures towards the paintings), it was important to make everything the same size, and more or less the same gesture because each work would act as a single note, and you could change the way that it functioned within an available container. And

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a lot of the time, talking about it that early on, I related it to the work *In C*—is anyone familiar with the Terry Riley piece—it's just one note over and over again, but depending on the undulation of the frequency, the instrument, or even one's own psychoacoustics or position in the room, it would change the experience of the sound. So, light in general is the replacement for that ambient shift with these works, and I think that's the thing that holds [the two bodies of work] in consonance.

YS: Yeah, I think the flickering of the light only highlights the context in which they're hung in this gallery, and even just the air circulation that affects the flame of the candle. For me, when I enter the space, the reflective quality of these surfaces—you could talk a lot about the gesture and the graphic component of each canvas. We read them as paintings because they're familiar in terms of their structure as stretched paintings, but for me they become these things that accentuate the space, and accentuate the light, and accentuate my movement in the space, and how I engage them. I've seen the show a couple of times, and each time I'm drawn to try to see the texture and subtlety of the variation in the canvases when I come close to their surfaces. But for me, the most enjoyable experience is standing right in the front door and seeing this sort of forest. And even just standing here before we started to talk, noticing how much the paintings flicker along with the light, and how they become a different thing depending on where I'm standing in the space and also how rapidly the track lighting is moving. It's about painting, but it also becomes a reflection of the space, and me, and my experience moving through it. Again, somebody could talk a lot about the relationship between historical painting—windows and doors, and the illumination that comes from painting and the history of that, but for me these things are sculptures. They're objects. I've always been curious about an artist's ability to feel a space, and to anticipate how one might engage with a space. These are all very frontal in terms of their relationship to the entry point of the room. We didn't mention these subtle moves, like the candle being in the back, and the desk being in the back, and the posts you didn't engage. I saw the exhibition before yours, and the posts were very prominent, and I kind of love them but I also kind of like how they almost disappear because they become these sculptures—I don't know if that's a question and more just something to talk about.

JK: I think there's a privileged point at the entrance towards which everything is set up, and just as the nature of the flame isn't constant, and it's causing this flicker -- this reminder of air's viscosity -- you're able to follow your own desire lines through the space and change the work that way.

YS: Another thing I'm interested in is the backs of the paintings, and this very particular—working in museums, I'm always thinking *how are these things hung?* The hardware is unique, or very uniform.

JK: Yeah, it was a way to connect the works. More or less, they're all set up on some sort of even standard where you're able to make spaces that you could walk through instead of spaces that you could experience less physically and more visually.

YS: But you've never shown them on posts before; or have you never shown these paintings?



JK: Not these ones, no. And no.

YS: That makes me wonder about your studio. These were made in your studio; they're ten years old, but I guess I wonder about your studio practice and how that plays into something that feels so...I hesitate to use the term *site specific*. Can you tell us a little bit about how you develop work in the studio?

JK: These were made at a time when I didn't have a studio, and so was the most recent work. The paintings were small enough to fit in my car, and I was able to kind of "batch" them as I trafficked between New York and Pennsylvania, which is where I was working with a chemist. This constraint lent itself to the quality of the work because if they're from separate batches, you cannot expect them to perform this uniform quality. At the time of the invitation of this show, I was again working without a studio and had this lighting component in mind. So, finding some common territory between the two projects was how this came about, and having someone whom I've known and trusted for so long to be the usher of it was very important.

YS: Do you have a studio now?

JK: I *do* have a studio now (laughs) Now, yeah. Between the time of the paintings being made and this, I was in Los Angeles for seven years, just going from place to place, never really calling anything a full-on studio, but now I think I have one that I'm happy with.

YS: Are you a routine-oriented person, generally?

JK: It would be better if I was, yeah...but I find ways to break that routine constantly. Amateurism was taught to us in school, and I still find myself falling into that rut of finding some virtue in being, like, not good at things.

YS: We should say that Jacob is from Buffalo. There's something interesting about coming from a city like that. I think a lot about Buffalo just in terms of pushing back against—maybe pushing back is too dramatic—but this idea of operating like an amateur or...

JK: Well, I didn't know that wasn't normal. Back then, having to pay attention to music and art and all this stuff at the same time...*that* was normal.

YS: As opposed to *being* a painter and focusing on painting.

JK: Yeah, I didn't know what that was, really.

YS: I see that in a lot of your work and this show. There's this sort of tinkerer element, at least in terms of the light and how the surfaces of these paintings were constructed.

JK: Have you ever taken the Meyers-Briggs test?

YS: I think I did a long time ago...

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JK: Anyone here done that? Yeah. I'm not a creative person (laughs).

Audience member: What are you? What's your type?

JK: Debater. ENTP (laughs). Arguing against certain things.

YS: I asked about the studio and I asked about the routine, and you also mentioned this move from LA to New York. I'm always curious about an artist who works—(laughs) I should also say that when we were on the phone the other day, you mentioned that this exhibition is sort of for Todd, it was sort of *for this space*. In my mind I was thinking *Do you want this show to travel, do you want to exhibit these paintings somewhere else, do they need to be installed on posts, does there need to be the light installation*, this sort of line of questioning and your response was basically *they can just go back to Buffalo* (audience laughs). I guess I'm just curious about how a studio practice works when so much of it is reliant upon the invitation to exhibit or the specificities of the space. I think a lot about this black floor, I think of the skylight, and generally the variation that happens with lighting and layout of gallery spaces.

JK: It's hard to fall into a sequence of activity when you're waiting for that very necessary conditional component to fall into place, or that invitation to happen, because of the severity of the paintings themselves, they were—at their most fertile point—meant to be highly situational objects that could be put in a space and calibrated towards that space. I've seen them in other areas that were outside of my control and it's definitely a compromise. Sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn't.

YS: Yeah, I guess that's the nature of basically making a mirror painting.

JK: Yeah.

YS: All I mean is that it's hard to control what's in the mirror.

JK: Yeah. Those conditions, those situations that were put on the work itself—limiting the size and the type of activity that could go on the surface—put more responsibility on volume or frequency, and how the work was treated in my own ends. So it becomes more a matter of composition or treatment.

YS: So if I'm following you in terms of the importance of the conditions of the space in which the works will be exhibited or the premise of the exhibition, do you feel your work changed between Los Angeles and New York? In my mind, each of those cities puts one in a unique mindset. They're so different. Do you operate outside of that dichotomy?

JK: I never mentally moved to Los Angeles.

YS: You stayed on the East Coast. I get it.

JK: I think I'm actually still in Buffalo.

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YS: Does anyone have any questions for Jacob?

Audience member: Hi, my name is Laura. Thanks so much for talking to us this evening.

JK: Thanks so much for coming!

Audience member: Can you talk a little bit about your technique.

JK: Sure! ...again, this is going back a long way, and I haven't really assessed my relationship to it lately; I went to a highly structural program, so having some sort of metaphorical relationship to the bath processes of photography was important. Actually, before the paintings came about, the first object to be dipped into these solutions and to maintain some kind of animated surface was a lobster, because that's something that dies on impact. You put it in another bath process and it comes out with this sort of reanimated quality of reflection. But then I wanted to remove the character from that and have the bystander become the thing that animated that space. That was another reason to not rely on a natural form, because nature doesn't really settle for a form outside of what it's already determined. Besides poundage, lobsters are more or less the same. So making these structures the same became every bit as important as that first series.

YS: I've read a fair amount about the gesture, of a painter's interpretation of this body of work, which is totally interesting. My reading of it is the way that the light functions. Of course, these are paintings, but for me, the gesture becomes less poignant because it becomes more about this light. There's a lot of great writing about Jacob's paintings. I was surprised by the vibe that the flickering of the lights sets in this space, and my general relationship to flickering lights in general. Even hearing the footsteps upstairs. There's a very particular tone. Maybe that's also due to the gallery's black floor and the generally monochrome nature of the space. Do you think about that, or is it simply a byproduct of this other line of thinking?

JK: This is a little bit of a tangent, but there was this show that happened in 2013 at The Kitchen, which is also a black and white space. Similar work was hung and I was trying to find some kind of medium in that space. The way that it was hung or placed was meant to sort of *split the difference* of this black box and white cube feeling. There's also this condition with that space where they can't have performances at the same time as exhibitions because there's too much vibration through the space, so that was something to be dealt with. So instead of avoiding it, we had a performance in both spaces at once to try and amplify this bridge between two acoustic spaces.

YS: But in terms of this space. I was surprised how this sort of feels dark...like, the combination of the flickering of the lights and the aesthetics of the space...it's sort of a funny *summer show* in terms of the—

JK: Right? I agree (laughs).

YS: I mean, at the outset of the show, was the idea *let's do a dark show?*



JK: No, no. It was more like *I haven't seen this work in a long time, so we're going to put this here and see how it functions alongside this new work.* It's more of a pedal than a work.

YS: It's funny, when you say *pedal* it makes me think of what you were saying before about the notes...each painting being a note.

JK: Right.

YS: And the connection to music. Then I think about Buffalo and—I told you I wasn't going to bring up any other artists—but Tony Conrad is very present. I'm not sure if you're all familiar, but Tony Conrad is a filmmaker and an artist, and a general experimenter. He has an iconic film called *Flicker* where it's just black and white frames. The film is ten minutes long? Longer? Twenty five minutes?

JK: Twenty-four minutes. Twenty-four, twenty-seven, somewhere around there.

YS: And what it does it—it's a structuralist film, but it just totally changes the room where it's shown because it's basically just light that goes on and off. And Conrad is also from Buffalo.

JK: I mean, I'm happy to take that.

YS: The Tony Conrad connection?

JK: He was the chair of the department at the school where I went, and he's an influence for sure. There was another film that he made called *Film Feedback* which was film being shot and processed between two rooms all at the same time. When you do that, the frame keeps shrinking, but if you don't have a *subject* in the space, it becomes invisible—the principle becomes invisible. So what they did was set up a candle so there was a set ISO for the camera, so this is a little bit of a—

YS: An homage?

JK: Well, I can't help but think of it a little bit—the candle being the subject and the broadcast being the light. Did anyone notice the matches? You can have these.

YS: The alternative to the catalogue.

JK: Yeah!

YS: It's a book!

JK: Yeah, it is a book!

YS: It's a matchbook.

JK: A really good book! (laughs)



YS: It's a nice touch. Maybe we could conclude by—It's really nice, the difference between the light in the corner and the track lights. The tone of the wick of the candle as opposed to the track lights.

JK: Yeah.

YS: So if everybody wants to wander around afterwards. The last thing that I wanted to ask you is—you mentioned the relationship with Todd—and that seems really sweet. It seems like a really nice reunion or something. And to come back to these paintings after ten years—

JK: Well, I mean the whole thing—even as we have to re-situate the candle—it does have a durational quality to it, and a long duration is definitely preferable.

YS: Are these paintings any different for you now?

JK: No, I don't think so.