



# JAIME BRETT TREADWELL

*Interview by HANNAH STOUFFER // Portrait by LEIGH VAN DUZER*



I HAVE TO ADMIT TO NEAR OBSESSIVE TENDENCIES WHEN IT COMES TO CATEGORIZING AND UNDERSTANDING THE VARIOUS PRE-EXISTING SUB-CULTURES OF BOTH PAST AND PRESENT AMERICAN CULTURE. AREAS OF SPECIFIC INTEREST SUCH AS MONSTER TRUCK RALLIES, SMALL SCALE CARNIVALS, THE COLLECTIONS OF “DISPOSEAPHOBICS,” AND EXTREMES IN RELIGIOUS THINKING RANK HIGHLY IN MY SELF-GRATIFYING SEARCHES. COMING IN CONTACT WITH THE WORK OF JAIME BRETT TREADWELL ONLY FEEDS THIS OBSESSION FURTHER. HIS CREATION OF UTOPIAN, TRANSIENT COMMUNITIES BASED OFF OF HIS OWN ATTRACTION TO AMERICANA UNVEIL MANY OF THESE REALITIES, OBSCURING THEM BY MERGING THEM TOGETHER.

His paintings display a super-saturated array of the kind of imagery you would hope to find at an untouched flea market, hosting preserved artifacts and nostalgic elements from our own bizarre existence. Though Jaime's work isn't only a stimulating visualization of this sometimes humorous, relatable imagery, it's a commentary for the wide variety of attractions and tendencies that shape societal realities. As a sub-culture enthusiast myself, I can't help but be completely enthralled and overwhelmed with some of these fantasy communities Jaime depicts. Appearing to be nothing less than a Hollywoodized pool party set in suburban trailer park, complete with Roman lawn decoration, 99 cent store décor and the banners from both Miss America and a used car lot, Jaime's work sets the tone for what may be a future reality for us as well.

*Hannah Stouffer:* How would you describe your work to someone who has never seen it?

*Jaime Brett Treadwell:* A clash between bubble gum,

drug store tourist tee-shirts, and a found-object sculptural assemblage.

Where is your favorite place to be in the whole world?

Every summer I head to my house in Maine. It is located in the middle of the woods, right on the coast. I love it there. I have a studio, so I can work. It does get isolating at times and I cannot imagine living there full-time. Overall, I prefer a quiet coastal town more than anything.

If you could spend an infinite amount of time inside one of your paintings, which would you choose?

Funny thing is I feel that I am more of a voyeur or people watcher and would hesitate to participate in any of them. Maybe that is why I enjoy creating them. The idea of spending infinite time anywhere doesn't appeal to me, but if I had to choose, I would live and make sculpture in *Heather's Wolf*. It feels like a utopian,

**ONE**

*I rocked myself to sleep well into my twenties.*

**TWO**

*I was an airport bartender*

**THREE**

*I play ice hockey every week in a men's league*

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***This Place Does Not Exist***

Oil on panel  
48" x 60"  
2011





## FUNNY THING IS THAT I WANTED TO BE SONNY CROCKETT FROM THE MIAMI VICE SERIES.

*The Wind Will Carry Me  
And Soon I Will Be Free*  
Oil on panel  
24" x 30"  
2012

icy-cold magical place.

Do you think any of the themes or elements in your paintings trace back to a childhood nostalgia?

Yes. I have this strange curiosity about transitory living, or transitory subcultures. The idea of constantly moving from one location to another interests me. I remember, as a child, I used to build small boats and set them to sail away in the ocean. I watched them disappear, speculating what adventures they would have, and my imagination would run wild. I also remember making, or attempting to make, a house, a car, and an airplane. My attempts were quite lame and awkward, but as I look at my paintings, they are pretty similar in concept. In retrospect, I think I wanted to make anything that would give me independence or the ability to travel.

Have you ever spent any time on a house boat?

I have not. I love the idea of living on a huge boat, but only if it was docked on land. I would freak out if I were stuck on a small boat without land in sight. I can't figure out why I paint them.

What about in a little canned ham trailer?

Somewhat... my first car was my dad's hand-me-down conversion van that he tricked out in the early '80s. The interior had wall-to-wall carpet, wood paneling, mood lighting, a poker table, and the back seat turned into a bed. However, it didn't see much action, I was a late bloomer. That was the closest thing to a tiny camper trailer, but I did go on several long trips... good memories.

What about carnivals? Do you love them as much as I do?

Carnivals, state fairs, used-car sale lots are all things that intrigue me. I wouldn't say I love them, but I am fascinated by these venues because they exhibit various facets of Americana and really interesting people. I could watch people all day.

So, are each of these elements in your works parts and portions that you like to draw from various subcultures or cultural identities?

Yes. I often use bits and pieces of objects or imagery that may represent cultural identities or time periods. In *This Place Does Not Exist*, I used the Trans-Am phoenix symbol for what it represents. When I was younger, this symbol represented everything that was cool, awesome, and darkly mysterious. The image of the Trans-Am exuded unapologetic beauty, sex, and power.

However, symbols can change meaning over time. Some people may now view it as a showcase of masculine freedom, while others view it as trashy and ostentatious. I enjoy mixing these different points of view together through imagery and pushing the dichotomy that exists. Currently, I am using the classic wolf portrait often seen on tee-shirts, blankets, and black velvet paintings. I am aware of rural kitsch and the irony of high/low subject matter. However, there is something that I genuinely love about the lonely wolf beyond the kitsch element. I once bought my girlfriend, who is a sculptor, a sculpture of a wolf-head/buck knife combo from a second-hand store. The gift was a bit of a joke, but at the same time there was an element of awesomeness to the sculpture. Viewers of my work





may not know my opinion or viewpoint, and I like to have it that way.

I've always been kind of fascinated by the idea of really refined subcultures, mainly in America, so heavily focused and nearly obsessing on some super specific event or element, like horse races or monster truck rallies. What are some of your favorites?

I am fascinated by hermit living. My father would tell me stories of people living deep in the woods in Maine, off the grid, in small homemade shacks, completely alone. I also heard stories of a community called "Pineys" that live deep in the woods of New Jersey. There is something strangely mysterious about isolation. My imagination takes over and I wonder what they do, or how they view the world. Sometimes, when I begin a painting, I try to imagine myself living in this community and making sculpture. What would it look like? If I can pull that off, I am satisfied.

Where do you source inspiration from? What or who do you look to?

I Google a lot! Other places I source from are rural small towns, homemade art, and odd objects. Recently I have been influenced by my girlfriend's sculpture and her weirdo drawings.

Tell me three things you can't live without.

Turkey hoagies, textural things to squeeze and animals

What color do you most identify with at the moment, and does that color often change?

In most of my paintings, I often use a color called Quina Red Rose, which looks hot pink. However, in my last four to five paintings, I have been incorporating purple sunsets, or purple snow-scapes, that I see in fantasy art of the '70s and '80s. I don't know why, but I am obsessed with purple recently.

**Heather's Wolf**  
Oil on panel  
30" x 24"  
2012



**Guns And Religion**  
Oil on panel  
60" x 48"  
2010

In my opinion, the colors you incorporate seem to stem from a super-saturated, re-dubbed episode of *Miami Vice*, with the contrast turned all the way up, during a pool party sunset scene, set in the futuristic 1980s.

That definition is probably the coolest description I have heard. Funny thing is that I wanted to be Sonny Crockett from the *Miami Vice* series. I wore the clothes and everything. I was a twelve-year-old dork strutting in a white sports coat. So, yes, *Miami Vice* fits the bill. Similar to the backdrop for that show, I guess my paintings are filled with candy color and all things corny-cool. By the way, I love the episode when singer Phil Collins makes an appearance.

Do you come up with a theme, title or idea behind each piece you begin, or do these surreal communities take shape as you create them?

I rarely sketch out full ideas to execute as a painting. They more or less develop into crazy communities as

I go. I spend quite a bit of time adding, editing, and adjusting. When I begin a new painting, I give myself a starting point or a situation and work from there. Sometimes previous paintings influence ideas, other times something comes to mind that I want to include in a painting. In *The Funeral*, I knew I wanted to begin with a gigantic above ground, outdoor pool, but did not know where the painting might go. I suppose the process of painting for me is like building a house around a window. Many decisions made it into what it is, but it was not completely preconceived. I am working on a painting now that began by stacking multiple camper homes. Eventually, it turned into a huge layered cake, commune, mural, carnival combo of some sort. Not sure where it is going, but I like the direction for now.

In your work, there seems to be two types of people, the blue, seemingly Greek figurative statues and the toned, bikini-clad babes. Is there a juxtaposition between the two of these that interested you, or do you



# I HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO LISTEN TO THE SAME MUSIC ON REPEAT THROUGHOUT AN ENTIRE PAINTING THIS COULD TAKE MONTHS.

really just like bikini babes?

Yes, there is a correlation between the blue figures and the bikini-clad women. Most of my decisions to use specific imagery originate from finding irony in odd relationships. The Greek statues represent an ideal female figure of that time period. And the bikini babes are representing themselves as the ideal figure of today through self-promotion. They both have similarities like suggestive clothing, posture and appear to be seeking the male gaze. However, we value them differently because of the context in which they are viewed. Some of the paintings show figures provocatively photographing themselves, possibly exhibiting self-worth through body image. These attitudes are re-established through reality shows like *Rock of Love* and *The Bachelor*. It's pretty frightening to see this mentality influencing popular culture. It does provide a wealth of material for me to use in my work. Americans have the freedom to display what is important to their identities. I am fascinated to see how both men and women go about displaying or showcasing what defines them.

OK, so if not the bikini babes, then what do you think is beautiful?

Natural eye liner on dogs and cats, deep breaths of cold pure air, and old rusty, awkward boats.

Do you keep a sketchbook? Tell me about your process.

I sketch where I can, on pieces of paper, envelopes, whatever is around. I also use my phone to photograph objects of interest, or I print out images from the Internet, then tape them to the wall in my studio. Sometimes I just stare at my collection of images. If I see something that might work in a painting, I might use it. If I need something, I will Google it and print out a suitable image. Most of my "sketching" happens on the painting itself, I work as I go. I sometimes wonder if I should expedite the process by working out the ideas on paper prior to painting but I fear it will eliminate the process of discovery and experimentation.

What is your studio set-up like? What do you need

close to you for a successful session?

My cat PrettyKitty usually hangs with me while I paint, which is nice. It would be too lonely without her around. I need music to break the silence. I have "painting stations" set up around my studio where I can work on several paintings at one time. On the technical side of things, I have to paint on panel while standing so that I can lean into the painting to stabilize my hand. This method allows me to render forms using smaller brushes, and to achieve clean edges. I need various measuring tools like transparent triangles, t-squares, various sized rulers, etc. I must have a computer and printer nearby. And the one thing I use most often are mop brushes, I call them blending brushes or blush brushes because they look like what women use to apply make-up. These brushes allow me to soften forms and eliminate brush strokes. Also, I use these when making reflections, which are in most of my paintings, if not all.

What do you listen to while you work and at what volume?

At medium volume, I will listen to happy, easy, slightly upbeat music to put me in a happy, upbeat mood. I have been known to listen to the same music on repeat throughout an entire painting, which this could take months. For example, the title of the painting *The Wind Will Carry Me And Then I Will Be Free*, are lyrics from the Christopher Cross song, *Sailing*. I must have listened to *Sailing* over 70 times during that painting, along with various songs from that era. Not all of my choices are dated to a certain time period, but I am a fan of cheesy '80s love songs. I am not musically inclined or in the know of what is new and cool. My friends often tease me because I am always a couple years behind.

What do you imagine your life path would have been like if you hadn't landed in the arts?

I love comedy. When I was younger, I used to envision writing for Saturday Night Live or some type of progressive comedy sketch show. I always wanted to participate at a round table discussion where creatives

top  
*The Second Coming*  
Oil on panel  
48" x 30"  
2010

bottom  
*I Put It In It*  
Oil on panel  
30" x 48"  
2011

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next spread  
*The Funeral*  
Oil on panel  
48" x 48"  
2012







MY MOTTO IS,  
“FIND PLEASURE AND  
REWARD IN HARD WORK.”

shoot ideas back and forth, pushing concepts further and further. I suppose painting is quite similar in that regard, with the exception of other people participating while you are working. My paintings are intended to have a sense of humor. If that comes across or not, it does not bother me, but as long as I am enjoying the process and the end result, I am satisfied.

And you're an art teacher too, correct? How much of your profession in education ties into your personal work?

Now, more than ever... I teach a color design course, and recently the projects I give students are clearly integrated into my paintings. Ironically, I do not teach painting very often. I teach mostly drawing, 2D, color design, and 3D design. I now realize that teaching, researching, and developing projects for those courses has influenced my work. I try to include more in my paintings than just the conversation of painting related only to its history or brush mark. Good painting, good photography, good sculpture, or just good art is all the same thing to me. The common denominator in good art, regardless of material, is when it moves beyond the discipline and relates to much more. I believe that teaching subjects like 3D design has helped me to consider more than just issues in painting. I often think of my paintings as sculpture. I love sculpture.

What is your teaching style like?

A combination of preparation and improv. Similar to that of my painting style, I prefer to work it out as I go. I find students respond to me better when words come naturally, rather than a stiff, prepared lecture. Also, I try to combine humor in my class to create a loose,

happy atmosphere. On the other hand, I am a stickler for a strong work ethic. I hold high expectations. My motto is, “find pleasure and reward in hard work.”

Future plans or projects?

I started a new body of work for a solo show at Mirus Gallery in San Francisco. The new work is a combination of biomorphic and geometric forms wedged into one. There are elements in my last painting, *Heather's Wolf*, that initiated new ideas. The new paintings look like paintings of invented sculptures, or at least I think of them as sculptures. So far, that is where things are... curious to see where it goes.

Plans later tonight, indulgences?

IPA and a Philadelphia Flyers Game! All smiles.

*For more information on Jaime Treadwell, visit [JaimeTreadwell.com](http://JaimeTreadwell.com)*

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