

MADELYN JORDON FINE ART

THE SCARSDALE INQUIRER
Friday, May 19, 2017

'Rebel, Rebel' artist Adam Handler paints his truth, bright and bold

By JORDANA WHITE

When Madelyn Jordan suggested the title "Rebel Rebel" for Adam Handler's new exhibition at her gallery, he was captivated by the idea.

"When I heard the title, my mind immediately went to the David Bowie song, thinking of myself as that rebellious person he describes," Handler said. "Of course, Madelyn was talking about the style of my painting, rebelling against tradition, but I still think it works on both levels."

His work is on view at Madelyn Jordan Fine Art, 37 Popham Road, through June 10.

Today, Handler's work — especially the "Tulip" and "Girl" series on display at Jordan's gallery — departs from traditional, realistic depictions of nature and the female form. But Handler's training is actually deeply rooted in that tradition.

"As an undergraduate at SUNY Purchase College, my degree was in art history, not fine arts," Handler said. "Taking art classes has taught me a lot, but I've found that studying art history, and viewing the work that came before me, has taught me the most."

Handler grew up in Queens, surrounded by some of the world's most important artworks.

"My grandparents owned Galas Framing Services in Brooklyn, and they did lots of work for galleries and even The Met," he said. "My mom was a New York City teacher and would drop me off at the factory when she went to work. While I was running around, I was liter-



ally surrounded by greats — Joan Miro, Marc Chagall, Andy Warhol, Henri Matisse — so I learned from an early age how art could elevate an environment."

When he was 18, Handler entered an art contest with a vaguely remembered abstract landscape.

"I was walking through the parking lot with my work, when a lady saw me and purchased that piece on the spot," Handler said. "When I saw that someone loved my work enough to pay me for it, even just a few hundred dollars,



Adam Handler, above, in his studio. Left, "Milano Girl," 2017. Oil stick and acrylic on canvas, 52 x 44 inches.

I realized that this was something I could do for a living."

That realization was the easy part, Handler admitted; finding his stride as an artist was the challenge.

"Having access to so many masterpieces in the city has really influenced my style."

— ADAM HANDLER

After graduating from Purchase College in 2008, Handler earned a master's degree in art history from City College of New York and then traveled to Italy to study life drawing. He also honed his skills in craft design under the tutelage of Jorge Nieves, and photography with Debra Mesa-Pelly.

Handler still sees himself as an American painter.

"I was born and raised in New York and have never lived permanently anywhere else," he said. "Having access to so many masterpieces in the city has really influenced my style."

That experience is evident in Handler's figure works "Moroccan Girl" and "Milano Girl" currently on display at MJFA. The women depicted are, like de Kooning's *Woman*, lacking

Continued on page 21

'Rebel' artist Handler

Continued from page 19

in obviously feminine features aside from crudely drawn breasts.

But de Kooning's influence stops there. Handler's painting technique and his choice of cheerier artistic themes translate into a body of work with a remarkable and unique brand. His influences are broad and include medieval and renaissance art, folk and primitive art. His canvases are often large, his brushwork is thick and his shapes are bold and direct.

Consistently, Handler's almost chalklike finish is evident in all of his efforts, an effect that enhances the brilliance of his color choices, but enhances them with a vibrant, kinetic background layer.

"First, I paint on raw canvas with acrylics underneath," he said. "Then, I go to my primary medium, an oil stick. It allows me to draw carefully and achieve the matte finish I want without dulling the vibrancy of the colors. It has its limitations, but once you accept those, you can really work the stick to achieve interesting effects."

Handler also regularly establishes a push-pull tension in his compositions, notably in his "Tulip" series.

"I paint these happy flowers that are thought of almost as having a smile on their face," he said, "but I work with colors that have a more funereal quality to them. It's more about representing a feeling than what exists in nature."

The same holds true in Handler's figure work.

"The figures I paint are inspired by two of the great loves of my life, my wife, Kelly, and my grandmother, Nilda Broeders. My wife has these amazing big eyes, like all the women in my figures. And the open-mouthed



PHOTOS COURTESY MADELYN JORDON FINE ART

Above, artist Adam Handler. Top, "Lake Worth Tulip," 2017. Oil stick and acrylic on canvas, 52 x 43 inches.

wonder you see in them reminds me of the expression my grandmother always wore."

Handler credits his growing acclaim to the deeply personal nature of his art.

"My work is very introspective," Handler said. "I try not to push to create something new and spectacular because when I do, it just comes out crappy. I started becoming a successful artist when I started being really honest with myself."

For more information about Handler's exhibit at Madelyn Jordan Fine Art, visit madelynjordonfineart.com.



FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2017/THE SCARSDALE INQUIRER/PAGE 21