

## Interview de Henry James Woolway par François BONNEL 2021

### Your first memory of painting?

My first memory of painting was in Primary School. I think we did all the usual kind of paintings, rainbows, houses, people playing football. I do really remember when I was about 8 drawing pages after pages of made up monsters, there was one in particular who had feet all over his body so he could roll around in any direction and his feet would carry him.

### How did you decide to become a painter?

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I became a painter reluctantly. I had a studio in London for 3 years, I used to make sculptural pieces from perspex, plasticine and metal. It wasn't until I moved to Liverpool and really the Covid lockdown in the UK that I started painting. I started painting because that's all I could do in my apartment. It wasn't too messy and was contained within the canvas. I did a series called 'Scraps' right at the beginning of lockdown in March 2020 and I have built on those early pieces to create the paintings I now produce.

### Did an artist particularly inspire you?

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I really enjoy the fluidity and the quickness of Cy Twombly. The freeness in his works felt instinctual. Twombly said "**When I work, I work very fast, but preparing to work can take any length of time.**" I really liked this approach to painting. Coming from a background of Art Directing in Films and TV I liked to be methodical about my processes but also wanted to create paintings that were made in the moment. I fell into a process which allowed for both, the thought process before, planning and visualising but then with the relatively high speed creation. Other artists that inspired me aesthetically include, Otis Jones, Ethan Cook Josef Zekoff and Monica Perez.

### Do you need to understand to love a painting?

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No. Context of a painting helps to unlock the possible meaning of the painting. Knowing the background of the person who created a painting also helps to unlock any meaning behind a painting, but I really believe you can love a painting with an unknown meaning, a painting you don't understand or a painting with no meaning. Paintings to me should have an effect for both the understanding and people who don't understand. I think anything aesthetically pleasing doesn't have to have a meaning to be understood or loved.

### What do you say to people who ask you if you are trying to get a message across?

I don't try to get a message across in my paintings, instead I try to get a feeling across. All my work is based on raw canvas torn and cut overlaid and overlapped with sections dyed with black paint, all of this I hope gives a sense of warmth and nostalgia. Each painting is different with some being darker than others or more structural but its the overall emotion from all my works that drive my creativity and this is what I hope people get from them.

### Is there a work for which you said to yourself "This is exactly what I wanted to do"?

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My original 4 pieces which I called the 'Scraps' Series was when I finally broke through into doing work that I felt was authentically mine. My series of paintings 'Changing Perspectives' which was one of the series was when I knew I'd found something of my own that was exactly what I wanted to create. It has the structural form with the cut up and overlapping canvas and the randomness of the paint on top.

### The famous work that you don't like?

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Campbell's Soup Cans by Warhol, I really like some of Warhol's works, especially the repetitive pieces where the quality of the print degrades with each copy like in the black and white pieces of Marilyn Monroe. The Soup cans are a little too on the nose for me.

### What is essential for your creation?

Preparation and time.

What bothers you the most, on a daily basis, in your work?

Working with canvas, its a great material but when you want it to tear straight it tears on an angle and when you want it to tear on an angle it tears straight. I am also finding myself needing more and more space as the process goes on and when I have big sheets of canvas drying on the floor this becomes an obstacle.

...And your greatest satisfaction?

I love creating something from nothing. I love the process. knowing when to do things and seeing it come together into a finished piece.

What is your relationship to recognition?

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I have been very lucky with the recognition i have had in my short painting career. I felt at the start it did help me carry on and push myself. I feel like I now no longer need it so much as my confidence with my work allows me to know when something is good and to trust my own opinion, which is harder than you think. As long as some people appreciate my work or my effort i'm happy.

If tomorrow you could no longer paint, what would you do?

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I would write a book, Ive got this idea to write 8 - 10 monologues on subjects that appeal to me then to spin them together and find common ground in them in a final monologue. I was thinking of getting peers of mine to write similar pieces on the same subjects and making this into a discussion book where you could read along and see if you agreed with the same person across the different topics.

Your artistic dream?

My dream is to continue to find the time to explore my ideas creatively. I've had a little slow 2021 and want in 2022 to get back into the studio and trial all the ideas Ive

**been jotting down over the last 12 months.**