

Painting

Kent Fine Art
210 11th Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001

kneumann@kentfineart.net
(212) 365-9500

JON CAMPBELL (b. 1982, Kingston, NY: Lives and works in Berlin, Germany)



SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Crying Wolf*, Gallery Molly Krom, New York, NY
- 2010 *Seen and Not Seen*, Styx Galerie, Berlin
- 2008 *I'll Be Your Mirror*, Galerie Jeanroch Dard, Paris
Galerija CONTRA, Koper, Slovenia
- 2007 *Proposing Jon Campbell*, James Cox Gallery, Woodstock, NY
- 2006 *Exorcisms*, BFA Thesis Exhibition, SUNY Purchase, NY
- 2004 *New Paintings*, Half Moon Gallery, Saugerties, NY

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 *Portraits: Reflected Visions*, Centro d'Arte Contemporanea Ticino, Bellinzona, Switzerland
- 2011 *Lo Stupore*, Associazione Marco Magnani, Sassari
- 2010 *Are you coming too?* Diskurshexe II, Galerie Knoth & Krüger / September Galerie, Berlin
The New Spirit of Painting, Galerija CONTRA, Koper, Slovenia
The Portrait Regained, Centro d'Arte Contemporanea Ticino, Bellinzona, Switzerland
First Service, Schwules Museum, Berlin
- 2009 *When I Grow Up*, Galerie Jeanroch Dard, Paris
- 2008 *At Home and Abroad*, with Nancy Campbell (mother), Michael Nelson Gallery, Saugerties, NY
STYX Project Space, with Melissa Frost, Berlin, Germany
Unadorned, A Show of Portraiture, 3rd Rail Studios, New Rochelle, NY
guest artist, with Salomé, Galerie Deschler, Berlin, Germany



- 2012 *Snackshop 5000*, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY
One Night Stand for the Land, Digital Design, New York, NY
Impact, Silent Space Gallery, Kingston, NY
Beacon Artists Union @ The Muddy Cup, Poughkeepsie, NY
Earthbound, Half Moon Gallery, Saugerties, NY
Abstract Realities, Windham Fine Arts Gallery, Windham, NY
Paint the Mountaintop II; a Plein-Air Painting Event, Windham Fine Arts Gallery, Windham, NY
Figure and Form, Windham Fine Arts Gallery, Windham, NY
A Spooky Thanksgiving, The Perception Lab, SUNY Purchase College
American Slam Dunk Paintings, The Perception Lab 1016, SUNY Purchase College
- 2003-2004 *Half Moon Gallery*, Saugerties, NY
- 2003 *Woodstock Artists Association*, Woodstock, NY

PUBLICATIONS

- "Junge Wilde", by Carsten Bauhaus, *MÄNNER Magazin*, April 2009
 "New Kid on the Bloc", by Travis Jeppesen, *disorientations.com*
 "Ambiguity as Idea: The Art of Jon Campbell", by Pat Horner, *InsideOut Magazine*, September/October 2006
 "Paint is in his Blood", by Paul Smart, *Almanac*, April 2004

EDUCATION

- 2006 BFA with a Concentration in Painting, School of Art+Design at SUNY Purchase College,
Magna Cum Laude
- 2001-2002 School of Visual Arts, New York, NY
- 1997-2005 Woodstock School of Art, Woodstock, NY

AWARDS

- 2011 Marco Magnani Prize





Painting

JON CAMPBELL PRESS

Kent Fine Art
210 11th Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001

kneumann@kentfineart.net
(212) 365-9500



Without a Name: Jon Campbell

A catalog essay for Jon Campbell's exhibition in Paris, which opens on Saturday, November 15th at Galerie Jeanroch Dard.

by Travis Jeppesen



Faced with the difficulty of writing about Jon Campbell's work, I can only try and identify the source of that complexity and get through it that way. Because we're not talking about a simple formal dichotomy here that can be readily broken down – the abstraction is figurative and the figuration is abstract. Nor can I imply that we are witnessing a rendering of the artist's innermost thoughts without inadvertently digging up the exquisite corpse of surrealism, soliciting the ghost of psychoanalysis. There is nothing gimmicky in these pictures to lend itself to a crude definition – they are without affectation – and there is certainly nothing "cool" about them. None of the blatant infatuation with irony that burdened so much of the painting done late in the last century. We're in a new century now, and the truth is, I'm writing this during a time when art writing – writing about art – has run out of steam, having bogged itself down in heady conceptual paradigms and didacticism, losing most of its audience in the process. Language, when not directly employed by an artwork, has effectively abandoned us. Jon Campbell feels this abandonment – this lack of language – but on a deeper level, beyond the mere literary. Now artists are expected to become indoctrinated via a multitude of (visual, etc.) languages from a young age. Jon, still at a young age though past his apprenticeship, has already chosen to reject all received languages. This is a daring move to make at any age in our era of mixing-and-matching, "sampling," whatever you want to call it. It means going at it all alone, without a safety net to fall back on. And this is painful, not just for the artist, but for us, who must contend with the work.

Yet there are also others, present in a series of portraits, executed in an extremely intimate manner in the artist's cramped studio in a delicate span of some ninety minutes each. They are portraits, and yet there is a sameness to them that effectively obliterates their subjects' uniqueness. It could be the artist himself we see projected. Lined up together, it is the sum of their expressionlessness that unites these men. They all become the same No One. By Campbell's own admission, the surfaces of his subjects are far less important than the situation that produces their rigid vulnerability. But this situation is absent – there is no background here to contextualize their placement.

In the accompanying works, what we find is pure situation – but again, without a clear context that lends itself to interpretation. Occasionally a figure may emerge, but it is always accidental – a shape designating a pole of thought, one that is necessarily private. So firm is the artist's belief in the autonomy of these images that he refuses to name them – for to name is to force an interpretation and to again rely on a fixed referential language as agent.

Campbell's situations, then, forces me to contend with my own battles in the realm of language. Campbell tells me that his grand theme is identity, and what is language but a projection of identity. But identity, in Campbell's paintings, is always masked. He has no interest in painting a particular personality. If he is evasive, then it branches from the same evasion that ultimately coats all human perception. Painting as a negative act in which the negative loses its value in a sea of specificity. The painter becomes a host of possibilities in this retrospective denial of arrival. What we are left with are the raw recordings, and the invigorating opportunity to explore them without a guide.



STREETS

About A Boy – Olivier Joly meets Berlin-based artist/singer-songwriter Jon Campbell

by Olivier Joly, Streets Magazine on February 10, 2016

Berlin-based American artist/singer-songwriter Jon Campbell is releasing his first EP, "About A Boy" on February 29. As he is preparing for his London live debut, supporting The Irrepressibles, Olivier Joly caught up with him to discuss music, art, love and being dubbed the gay Johnny Cash.



About A Boy is your first EP, but you have been writing and singing for several years. What made you decide to record these songs and perform them live?

I'd never really put too much thought into reaching a broader audience with my music other than my close friends. I had recorded demo versions of these songs in my bedroom and printed cardboard sleeves with linocuts for the CDs –literally hand-painting each copy, and gave them as gifts to friends. But performing or even playing the CD for someone was something private, like a love letter. It was basically Jamie Irrepressible's encouragement that convinced me to share these songs not just with friends and lovers, but with a broader audience.

You are also an acclaimed artist. How do you find the process of writing and recording songs as opposed to painting?

The processes are actually remarkably similar to me. Which makes sense, I suppose, because it all comes from the same place, more or less. In painting I'll start by laying down a ground colour, like a bass line or simple chord progression. Defining the shape of a painting is the same as defining the shape of a song – the only difference is the dimension you're working in. What I often find is that both mediums tend to take on a mind of their own. I might sit in front of a blank canvas or pick up my guitar and have an idea like: "I want to paint about this thing, or write a kind of love song, or make an abstract painting..." but at some point – if I'm doing it right – the painting or the song takes on a life of its own, at which point I'm just there to nurture it, and to follow my creative instinct. But for me there's a crossover of the two things – some songs are like portraits, and vice versa. 'The Gayest Picture' is a good example of that: a boy sat for me who I was secretly in love with and I spent hours painting his portrait – an experience which is incredibly intimate – studying every tiny detail of colour and tracing every line in someone's face. The adrenaline was so intense,



it felt like I was having a heart attack! Afterwards, I came home, picked up my guitar and wrote 'The Gayest Picture'. So to me, the song is also a portrait.

You have been living and working in Berlin for almost a decade. Do you feel it is easier to be an artist there rather than in the US?

I guess I came to Berlin partly because I thought it would be easier to be an artist here, and in some ways it is, because the rents are cheaper and you can get by working a part-time job. But of course that has its downside as well, because it can lead to a sort of complacent attitude towards work. It's hard to find the time in New York City to make work, but the struggle to survive keeps your fire burning. In Berlin, there's a pretty fine line between 'bohemian artist haven' and 'decadent disco theme park' – and that identity crisis is very real in Berlin, but along that fine line there is a lot of magic in this city. That being said, I don't think it's easy to be an artist anywhere – because no matter where you are – you're still an artist – and that's often not an "easy" disposition.

How does the city inspire you? As a painter and musician?

I think it's that identity crisis which is most inspiring to me about Berlin. It's a city that is constantly re-defining itself and undergoing massive traumas and transformations. There's an energy in the city that's reflected in the type of people who choose to live here which is exciting, curious and sexy. It's also a city with a really intense dichotomy (aside from the obvious east-west one). Where I live in Kreuzberg was at one time 'the edge of the world', so to speak, and there's still a sort of near-apocalyptic energy here, especially in the winter. It can be a very dark place in a lot of ways, but in that darkness there are groups of people creating really beautiful, uplifting and life-affirming things.

You have been compared to a "queer Johnny Cash". Do you see yourself as a gay artist/musician?

Yes I do. Sexuality has always played a role in my paintings, and my songs are often specifically gay love songs. I say "specifically" because some of them really couldn't apply to a straight story, for example singing about the unrequited love of a straight man. I suppose the closest thing from a straight perspective would be something like Weezer's "Pink Triangle", where the singer has fallen for a lesbian woman.

You are not a country singer per se though and your musical influences extend way beyond the typical singer-songwriter, towards electronica even – as in "Zu Sonderbaren Zeiten". Do you feel you belong in a particular scene?

Not really, no. The musical styles represented on the EP are like different skins on the same skeleton. They are thematically very similar in most cases. That gets back to the idea of portraiture, like a series of portraits of men – different men – but sung from the perspective of the same secret admirer. So they're similar in that they're self-portraits, but also different in their delivery depending on the "model" in front of me.

There aren't many – if any – mainstream openly gay artists writing and singing about gay subjects/relationships. Do you feel any connections with other gay musicians?

Definitely. Obviously as a young gay adolescent, one tends to gravitate to music that you can relate to thematically as well as musically, and the first time that happened for me was with The Smiths, but then particularly with Morrissey's 'Bona Drag'. I remember the first time I heard that album and really had a sense of it being a gay record, and for an awkward, scruffy, gay artist in Small Town U.S.A, the impact of listening to an album like that at age 15 can be enormously powerful. Joni Mitchell's 'Blue' and Morrissey's 'Bona Drag' both had huge impacts on me at that age, and then later it was Stephen Merritt and Rufus Wainwright as well as The Irrepressibles.



Jamie Irrepressible produced the EP and features in several of the songs on the album. How did you find working together?

Working with Jamie was an incredible experience for a lot of reasons. First of all his arrangements are just beautiful. He has an ability to hear essential undercurrents that are missing and bring them forward – without overdoing it – so you end up with arrangements that are exactly what they need to be – not more and not less. Jamie is also such a do-er, typically Aries. He gets his sights set on something and he sees the steps to take in advance and figures out how to get it done, and does it. This might seem obvious to other people who are good at making things happen, but I'm a Sagittarius, a dreamer but also a worrier and a skeptic sometimes, especially with projects of the scale of making an EP. I can handle a painting exhibition, because it's just me in a studio, making one painting at a time usually, and it's like: if you run out of red, you go to the shop and buy more red. With all of the work involved in an EP, it's so much more involved in terms of the steps needed to get it done well, and requires organisation beyond the scope of what I could do or even handle on my own. Jamie has done an incredible job making it happen, arranging and mixing, performing and producing. I'm a very lucky guy!

You will be supporting The Irrepressibles in London. What can we expect from your live performance?

I'm super excited to perform in London! It looks like a beautiful venue and it's like a dream come true to work with The Irrepressibles. We're going to do a few of the more orchestral songs from the EP, as they suit the space and setup very well.

What next? More music? Exhibitions?

Yes and yes! I'm continuing to write new songs and preparing them for the studio, which will eventually be on a full-length LP. And at the moment I'm spending most nights in the painting studio, preparing for a solo exhibition at Galerie Michael Schultz in Berlin, which will open on April 2nd. So I'm having to balance my painter hat with my music hat with my boyfriend hat and my day-job hat, and learning to throw away the worry hat and just do!

