

BUREAU

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The **BUREAU**
INTERVIEW



Painter Christopher STOTT / BUREAU Guest Artist Music Edition 2016 / Courtesy of George BILLIS Gallery

CHRISTOPHER STOTT

BUREAU: Your Paintings currently are based in realist style with a very clean background allowing the object to stand on its own, what led you to pursue this format ?

Christopher Stott : I have an affinity for minimalism and simplicity. Even when there is a cluster of objects, like a bunch of clocks or cameras, the painting still consists of just repeating shapes, making them still simple. There is also a definite modern aesthetic that I like – almost like an advertising aesthetic where the subject is presented front and centre.

BUREAU: Although it is realist work, there is a stylized quality to the application of paint, discuss your choice of tone and light when painting.

Christopher Stott : My technique for painting – inspired by an indirect painting style. It starts with a drawing that is transferred to the canvas. I carefully place the lines on the canvas, paying close attention to where the object lands on the canvas, considering the negative space. The spacing and placement of the objects is always very symmetrical. I'm looking for a pleasing balance to the design of the composition. I lay in the lines with a raw umber + ultramarine blue, and once that's dry, I put a raw umber + ultramarine blue wash over the entire canvas. Then the real work begins. I start put down an entire underpainting of thin color. This is where observation of the object is important. You noticed that there is a stylized application to the paint. Despite the fact that my paintings are realist, they are not hyperrealist. There are paint strokes, I'm not trying to blend away or hide the fact these are paintings. During the laying down of the first layers of color, the drawing is often totally lost and I have to rebuild the painting. During this time, the paintings become subtly stylized. Once the underpainting is dry, which is a fast process as I use fast drying painting mediums to speed the process, I start adding more thin layers of paint. I work over the entire canvas - all areas of the painting at all times. It's just the way I work. I don't lay in and finish section by section, instead it's a series of thin layers over several days. As the painting is worked, the elements that make up the subject shift. These are representations of the subjects, not factual reproductions or technical illustrations. The subject is transformed and I think when viewed in the flesh you get a sense that these man made objects become ever so slightly more organic. I like the build up of paint. I like the depth and complexity of layers. It's a slow process, and I think people get a sense of the time put in to this type of painting.



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BUREAU: *Objects play a key role in your body of work, how do you choose what to paint and can you remember being attracted to these type of objects as a young person ?*

Christopher Stott : The objects all have gears, knobs, dials, buttons, they're completely tactile objects. Some are complicated engineered machines, like the typewriters. There's some element of steampunk coolness to them. I've always like the analog world – I spent a great deal of time in a traditional dark room and working with film cameras. I find that all the design and engineered elements of the objects give them character. I don't just paint things because they're old. It's more complicated than that. I can walk in to a room full of typewriters and immediately start identifying the ones that would make the best subject for a painting. The objects have to have a great silhouette (this is another way the negative space is important), or a design element that makes them stand out, or a color that pulls you in.

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BUREAU: *How much time will you invest in a painting such as the new works: Typewriter, Projector, Books and what draws you back to the same object ?*

Christopher Stott : I almost feel like I'm part of a slow painting movement. The paintings take 2 - 3 weeks to complete, depending on the subject. A typewriter would take the longest to complete. Books are relatively simple and do not take much time, they're just a series of rectangles. I keep painting the same subjects because I think commitment and consistency is critical to growing technical skills and to building a solid understanding of one subject. Each time I finish a painting I think of how it could be better, what could be ever so slightly changed, and the best way to find out if you can improve is to simply do it again.

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BUREAU: *The stark backgrounds allow for the object to speak to the viewers, discuss negative space and size.*

Christopher Stott : Negative space plays a key role in my paintings. The space around the object is where the sense of light and depth are made. I spend time thinking about how much or how little negative space each object needs in order to stand out, to be presented. I'm always trying to figure out the proportions, to get the balance just right. The negative space makes the object almost like a bulls-eye – it draws the viewer in. The use of the negative space also helps to burn the image in to the viewers mind. I want the viewer to remember what they saw.

"My paintings are made up of complex objects with fine details, but I see them as essentially a breakdown of simple shapes. Circles, squares, rectangles, repeating lines and shapes – all these formal elements are found in any number of isms. "

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BUREAU: *Do you personally believe in a school of thought, realism, abstract expressionism, cubism for instance, or is this really just a professional approach ?*

Christopher Stott : I've always been a realist. But I keep an open eye and mind when it comes to art. I want to understand, or at least explore, what all artistic schools are about. Their history, their culture, their politics, all of it has elements that can be found everywhere, even if it's in just small amounts. I think all art has something to say, so I set aside my biases. My paintings are made up of complex objects with fine details, but I see them as essentially a breakdown of simple shapes. Circles, squares, rectangles, repeating lines and shapes – all these formal elements are found in any number of isms. I think there are lines connecting all art.

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image : Bureau Guest Artist Painter Christopher Stott

Courtesy of George BILLIS Gallery New York + L.A.

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The BUREAU INTERVIEW CHRISTOPHER STOTT

"Look close at my work and you'll see they are deconstructed Edward Hopper paintings. The scenic elements, the props and objects in Hopper's paintings, they are all what I paint. "

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BUREAU: The sense of style and love of the object in your work is eye catching, how long have you been painting and who are your influences as an artist ?

Christopher Stott : As a kid growing up I took private art classes which I now understand were amazing. It's almost as though every step of my life since I was 10 years old has set me up to be a realist painter. So after childhood drawing classes I eventually found myself pursuing a bachelor of fine arts and oil painting 16 years ago. Right off the bat I took an interest in the objects I paint. In fact, in my recent show at the George Billis Gallery in LA, there's a painting of a black rotary phone. That was the first vintage object I ever bought as a prop for painting. That was in 2000. I painted it for this show to show my philosophy of consistency – it's how one comes to "own" their subject.

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Christopher Stott : Look close at my work and you'll see they are deconstructed Edward Hopper paintings. The scenic elements, the props and objects in Hopper's paintings, they're all what I paint. I'm influenced by the era, by the design and architecture of this time. I also look closely to Wayne Thiebaud. Look at Thiebaud's repeating cakes, pies, cupcakes (and other objects)... see a row of 4 cupcakes with distinct shadow play, now look at my row of four cameras.

My remix would be to use a Dutch masters 17th century technique of paint application and to use soft neutral light and shadow whereas Thiebaud applied crisp light with a thick build up of paint. I also straighten and compose my objects more orderly, but Thiebaud's use of large negative space is a definite influence. Influences that are more current would be the work of Scott Fraser and Daniel Sprick. Scott Fraser more so than Sprick, but their technical achievements and mastery are where I aim to be one day.





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BUREAU: Does Music or Film or Literature play some special activity, inform or inspire your work process, if so, please tell our readers a bit about that process.

Christopher Stott : Literature is most important to me. I'm a big reader. I get asked how I read so many books all the time. It's simple, instead of clocking 50 hours of TV viewing, I read. When I first got very serious about painting, I told a friend that I wanted my work to eventually, over time, to be "read like a novel". By that I mean, I want someone to see that I've put in the time, that I've considered everything on the canvas, that it's all deliberate. The objects I paint all have a narrative built in to them. They tell stories, they have a theme. The clocks are about the passage of time. The phones are about communication, about reaching out. Typewriters are tools used to tell stories, the tool used to put your thoughts and ideas on paper. The books I paint are all vintage books with a heavy dose of nostalgia, an idealized world view. The cameras are image makers themselves. The projectors the tool a film maker uses to show their work. They're history lessons. And good literature not only tells compelling stories, but they end up teaching you as well. Like Orwell's 1984, or Huxley's Brave New World. Great stories, but even better at showing ways to view our history, our current culture, and and a way to try and figure out where we're going.

These books I read around a time I would consider to be a bit of an "awakening" for me. This is right when I found my subject to paint, when things fell in to place. I seem to have a liking for 20th century classic fiction. I think that's apropos considering the subjects I paint are of the same era. Steinbeck has a spot my my bookshelf. And if you want a good laugh you have to read "A Confederacy of Dunces," by Jon Kennedy Toole. Going a bit further back in time, I enjoyed many Dicken's books, which brings me right to the present: I'm always looking for the line that connects our present culture to that of the past, so I find myself enjoying great new fiction as well. Donna Tartt's "The Goldfinch" is a great read. And I've also enjoyed Jonathan Franzen's major works. His most recent work "Purity" is like a modern day Dickens book as is "The Goldfinch". But when I'm looking for a challenge, something to throw a wrench in my Western views, I found Haruki Murakami's novels. I like the difference in the story structure, the motivations of the characters, the fact that the history in the novels is not one written by white Christian males. My paintings are all objects from a time that we idealize. My subjects all hail from the past century specifically to stick within a world that is familiar, yet ever so slightly out of reach.

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BUREAU: The Titles, sometimes hint at humor or philosophy, as in the painting entitled, "Adjusting to New IDEAS." others are more straight ahead. Describe creating a tableau and how you challenge yourself.

Christopher Stott : Titling is something I've grappled with. 90% of the time I think that my paintings work best when they are just as they are – straight forward and to the point. So most of the time I don't title them, I simply state what is in the painting. I do this so that the viewer brings their own ideas and interpretations and makes the painting their own experience. However, on for some paintings I want to guide the viewer – like with "Adjusting to New Ideas". It's playful, but I don't want it to be "silly" or too obvious.

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BUREAU: *Where do you live and work and how does that influence your work ? Give us a List of things to do in your hometown.*

Christopher Stott : I live in Victoria on Vancouver Island – I'm surrounded by a tradition and community of visual artists. I specifically came here because the artistic appreciation and culture: It's a good place to be. Because I live in a small but stately city with a booming tourist industry, there are food experiences everywhere. Food trucks by the Royal BC Museum, brunch downtown at Mo:Le or Jam Café, Fish and chips on the inner harbour is a must and I'm constantly going to the bakeries in town – fol epi, Fry's, Wildfire.

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We also like going to under-the-radar documentaries and film at Cineceta at the university campus, and I'm spoiled by a good friend and neighbor who treats me to numerous live theatre events at the Belfry, Langham Court, Intrepid theatres. But the best thing Vancouver Island has to offer is the outdoor experience. Hiking the hills, trails and coastline is world-class, unique and unforgettable. Hiking through a rain forest to a secluded cove and getting to watch a pod of whales is a clearing and inspirational experience. I came to this island to be able to experience these things year round. I spend most of my time in my in-home studio slowly working on my paintings, so getting out and seeing these things keeps me feeling alive.

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