

# EAST CITY ART



## Wade Carey Q&A with Jay Hendrick, CONNERSMITH Academy 2013 Participant

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Interior of studio with works in progress. Photo courtesy of Jay Hendrick.

*I sat down to talk with Jay Hendrick at George Mason University Fairfax Campus on June 25. His studio is located in the School of Art within the University's Art and Design Building, opened in 2009 and recognized for design excellence by the American Institute of Architects. Jay is one of the featured MFA students in the invitational show titled **Academy 2013** at CONNERSMITH Gallery, located at 1358 Florida Avenue NE. This is the 13th annual group show, founded by Dr. Jamie Smith, featuring work from artists from regional fine arts degree programs. The event is now eagerly anticipated as summer approaches and is a regular part of the Washington arts calendar. This year's show is set to open Saturday, July 13, and will run through August 24. This transcript of our conversation has been reviewed by the participants and has been edited for concision and clarity.*

**Wade Carey:** I want to tell you that I did try going to your Web site and looking at your Facebook page, trying to see a little bit about you. Not seeing much other than that you are here [at GMU] and that you were in Abilene [He received a BAS in 2011 and a BFA in 2012 from Abilene Christian University.] before, I read your blog posts but there wasn't a whole lot to read. It was interesting to look at the pictures. Really, what you see on the Web is mostly the visual evidence of your painting. So, I figured rather than trying to adopt some kind of an approach like, "I've really figured you out, so now you explain yourself," let me just ask you to tell me where you came from and when you started really becoming an artist.

**Jay Hendrick:** Well, I'm from a small town. That's relative, I guess, in Texas. There are little tiny thorsps that are 60 people. But in comparison to here or Dallas or New York it is a small town. It was very Christian. Sometimes I use the word fundamentalist but I don't know if that's fair to them. At least in my interpretation, value was added and certain answers were given to me. That is the place that I come from. That does come into how I think quite a bit, having value added. So, I lived in a small town most of my life. At the age of fifteen I decided that God didn't exist. I was in a reactionary sort of mood back then, in my hubris. But then I got older, around the age of 30. I had always been writing, but at the age of 30, I thought I would go to university and take a few classes to learn to write better. That is when I ended up taking a few art classes and really enjoying that. I guess like some of the artists I know I wasn't born with a brush in my hand or that sort of thing. I've come to it a little bit later. The work has come from that, I suppose. All of these grids have come from more of a cognitive place analyzing the values of modernity. After quite a bit of thought—and why I really think I do this—I think it is trying to find value and pattern and a tether after coming from a place where "X" was the case wherein, at least for me, if God exists, that doesn't answer, and that leads to why certain questions maybe aren't as necessary to ask because if God exists and if there is an afterlife then a lot of the questions that I deal with, I can move on and dig into other things. I guess it is common or matter-of-course but I am another Southerner coming from a Christian background and thus and in some way dealing with that. But I suppose that is all over the place. I have a friend from Pennsylvania. He is coming from a Catholic background and he is dealing with some of the same issues. He is also in the Connersmith show, Steve Skowron. Do you want me to get into the content of the work? Is that bio enough?

**Wade:** What is important is the process. When we go to a show we see what is there. We see what ends up on the wall or on the floor or in the experience in the case of a performance. What people like me want in writing for East City Art is a chance to talk with an artist and have a chance for a little exposition. When you are working especially with students who are working on fine arts degrees there is a chance to talk about what else is going on and that is what I am hoping to do with the Q&As.

**Jay:** I can talk about that because it is something I think about quite a bit. Certainly, Dave Hickey has his opinions about academia and I suppose what he would call the mediocrity coming out of all these [MFA] programs. There are thousands and thousands of artists. I heard just this morning that there are something like 60 thousand MFA students every year. I don't know if that is true but if it is, you know, that is a real concern that I suppose all of us have to deal with. I think that it is a really going to be a really difficult place to be in. Are these institutions producing artists that are essentially producing work for juried exhibitions? This relates to that... there's 12 of them... and it looks like there's really content on the same vein... is that really valid? Is it valuable for history in the context of relating to history and in the contemporary? And is it necessary? Someone said to me the other day, does the world really need another damn painting? I think that's, with all these institutions, academies, maybe progressive schools and whatever, we all have to answer those questions. I think about it quite a bit. I think that a lot of what I am doing here is an analysis of specifically institutions but definitely of art schools. This cardboard is mostly from art institutions. I'm painting on it because I'm trying to see if the place I've come from, academia, really holds that much value for me in the greater context. These are people that have an eye and they think through aesthetics; I guess that is their lens, to some degree. But then they have these internal organs that help keep this whole thing going which is all these cardboard things and other packaging and whatnot. Then it's

garbage. They are the ones who aestheticize, who would take a phenomenological approach, like Robert Irwin, who would suggest the experience itself, a little singularity, is the viable thing and has the consciousness-raising capability to change us and rather than it being a thing to take and ponder and see on a wall. That is what I think about with regard to how artists throw these things away, these cardboard things. Because a lot of these are for juried exhibitions. These are from my friends. These are the boxes they send their work in. Then some of these things are internal mail and then they're garbage. It is funny, I paint on them, for sure, but for a while I just put them up on the wall and just stare trying to assess the value for myself and for others. Because everything is there on this cardboard. There is the record of where it has come from, stains, smudges, and then there are things printed on it, writing. I think there are the formal things that we would talk about, like drawing and painting, and I guess it's really just a post-Duchamp-ian Readymade, in following that vein. I don't know that it's really much of a dialog with history but personally, that is why I have been dealing with the cardboard for so long because I feel it is—there is a lot I could talk about with the cardboard. I could go on and on.



Jay Hendrick, *Precise Doubt*, 2012, acrylic on cardboard. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Wade:** The cardboard itself is important to you. That is what you have said, so far. I don't see what's wrong about going on about it. What is it about the cardboard?

**Jay:** Well, for me it comes back to value because this is essentially trash when I get it, but it still has value in a larger context. But we will ship things with it and then it is just thrown away. So it depends, in part, I guess, on what the economics is in these institutions, and their larger aesthetics. It is also for me an attempt at trying to

discern value after “X” was the case back home. Because this painting thing is traditionally something that is a poster child for a lot of people being able to say that it’s “dead.” These passive things on a wall, they would only exist in continuum of capitalism or that sort of thing. For me, I guess, it is a formal analysis. This brown [cardboard] changes what happens with the paint. When I put a cadmium red on top of that it makes it kind of a sienna which I think is fascinating because it makes me think about Byzantine painting. That would be the ground and then they would start building on that. I think it is mostly that it is a bullshit material. It is not going to last. I know that there are Picasso paintings and other paintings that on cardboard that are still around but it is not on canvas, not on wood, and there are reasons why we use those things. They are practical reasons. This is not practical. Dealers are telling me I can’t sell this cardboard shit. And so I am dealing with, how idealistic am I? Am I foolish to be working on this? I think that I kind of am. I need to sell stuff.

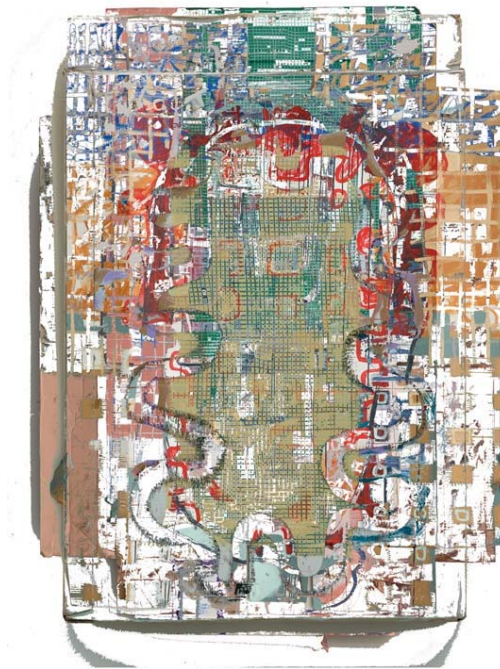
**Wade:** I would also ask, what are you selling? I would understand that you want to express yourself as an artist and that you would like to be recognized by selling. There is the recognition of an artist in the world of commerce in being sold, being recognized in the world of galleries, or museums—the world of commerce. What is it that you would sell?

**Jay:** In a practical sense, the objects.

**Wade:** They would be objects. They would be artifacts.

**Jay:** Yes, although some of it can still come out as an artifact. I guess you saw the erased paintings online?

**Wade:** Yes. I hoped they would come up in the course of our conversation. I am beginning to get a sense that the process isn’t what one might first think it is. This might be a good segue into what the process is, how the erased painting comes into being.



Jay Hendrick, *Four Erased Paintings*, 2013, digital media. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Jay:** I believe this one [shows me the digital print, *Four Erased Paintings*] was taken from what *New American Paintings* [see end note[i]] wanted me to send them. Being accepted for that publication was a lot to deal with. I think about it often. Someone will come into your studio and it is more distracting when they say, "I like this," than, "I don't like this," for me, at least. Since I am in a constant state of tension about value, back and forth, I feel like I have to erase my own genius, or something. I think it is really quite simple. Someone says, "This is good," then I have to check that. And I have been thinking about this interview. I am going to do a piece about this interview. This is the first interview like this. I'm not exactly sure. I might go back and redact it. I might find myself really hating it. It is just a strategy of attempting to get some kind of circumspection.

**Wade:** Well, nobody is going to accuse you of not being overly analytical.

**Jay:** I have been told that I should stop reading. Actually, the first book that was suggested that I read when I came here was *Moby Dick*. Because, I mean, I am too analytical.

**Wade:** But you are not going to stop being you, so... tell me more about this process.

**Jay:** This is four paintings. I take photos and then I put them in Photoshop and kind of repeat some processes which I haven't actually discussed with you yet. In some of the processes I feel that I have to approach painting like it is bullshit, so I need to test the value of painting itself as I make the painting. I make marks like a schmuck, here is a bullshit mark. I guess it is an analysis of a Pollock genuine sort of stroke. But as I am doing it I feel like actually this is genuine and then actually it's not and it's this constant, constant loop of yes and no. I call it "layering indifference." It just keeps happening. And that is what happens here. It is just these photographs. The paintings are layered and I erase them in Photoshop in the easiest way. Anybody can do what I do. It's just the magic wand tool and the delete button. It finds areas of value and it rips it out. What you get is really fine tears and I really appreciate that. It is like a palimpsest of my own systems all compared to themselves. It is what I used to talk about quite a bit when I would erase and then layer like this. Here is my claim and here is the anti-claim in an internal layering of indifference. I could get into punk rock at this point. That might be a little into left field. I have a lot of things I think about with this process.

**Wade:** That tells me that what you have here is a digital product.

**Jay:** So there is the genius of the painter in the analog level and the filter of the electronic. That is part of what I am trying to analyze. The reproduction is bouncing back and forth with that with Marshall McLuhan.

**Wade:** And the sum of those parts is what you present printed on paper.

**Jay:** That is as far as I have got so far but I could project on a mirror.

**Wade:** Let's back up a second and talk about when you first came into contact with Jamie Smith [curator of the *Academy* shows].

**Jay:** We formed a George Mason graduate group. The organization is called Artifex [SOA MFA: Graduate Artifex]. It is a collective of the MFAs here at George Mason and what we did is put together an open studio event here at Fairfax curated by Judy J Sherman. A real force behind Artifex and the open studio event was Rahshia Sawyer. She won an award here at Mason for all her work on the event. We got the organization going and we did some things and it went well. Now we are trying to get some local and international group exhibitions. Helen Frederick who founded Pyramid/Atlantic knew that the open studio was coming up. Of course, Mia Feuer is represented by Connorsmith and she teaches here. My understanding is that Helen invited Jamie to come out and she agreed. She looked at our studios and chose five of us for the exhibition, three painters, a printmaker and a photographer.



Jay Hendrick, *Erased Discarded Painting*, 2013, acrylic and oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches. Photo courtesy of CONNERSMITH

**Wade:** That's good. I wanted to know. I was vaguely aware. I didn't remember George Mason being in the picture [in recent *Academys* shows].

**Jay:** We are trying to slowly make people more aware that we exist.

**Wade:** It seems not for want of love and money.

**Jay:** They've got money. It is a big university.

**Wade:** There has been a lot of energy going into trying to make it recognized for the talent that is coming here.

**Jay:** Peter Winant, Steve Cushner, and Tom Ashcraft work with Hemphill. Helen Frederick just curated a show in DC and she started Pyramid Atlantic. Mia is at Connersmith. Rahshia Sawyer just won a huge award at the François Schneider Foundation. Ryan McCoy is at Longview. Nathan Loda was a semifinalist for Trawick. It is funny because there are all these people who work here who are definitely plugged into DC and beyond, at least as far as I know.

**Wade:** It's clear that the arts component here at George Mason is pulsating to anybody who's looking. Is there anything to derive from the grids, the fact that most of the things that I see have some sense of a loom or grid pattern, a vertical/horizontal?

**Jay:** It was an attempt at living within a system of analysis. It began as a way to try to understand why Mies van der Rohe or Mondrian believed in what they believed in because if that is where I have come from then I want to analyze that. It went from a tiny study to a body of work. I have been painting grids for three years now. They began geometric and to some degree hard edge with defined right angles. There are still plenty of right angles but it has become organic. That fascinates me that it would do that. It was an analysis of modernity but most especially of architecture. I feel like architecture or our constructed environment is definitely a lens for how we view reality, a Zeitgeist, perhaps. I don't think architects are making things in a vacuum. There is something very important and very telling about humans thinking on a larger scale. I don't think that it is purely, so-and-so is a rich architect, and then his group makes this big building to show off. That's there, but it is really complex. That being the case, if in my mind there is a lot of value in architecture, at least pointing to what we think is valuable, I needed to process that in some way. I guess this is sort of that abstract system of grids.

**Wade:** The reason I ask is that it seems to be a concrete way of imposing rationales or a sense of what can be rational—how to create the rational out of the irrational—or trying to seek rational explanations in what may be evidence of the irrational.

**Jay:** Yes, in the past I have talked about it as if I am graphing. There is something called a shadow graph which is a kind of measurement—just the words themselves are fascinating to me—to measure something ephemeral or unknown like that. I will put something down and then I will draw around it as way to impose on it and then define it but I switch the binaries, I think. There is something with the 90 degree angle but that is graphed by something round. It goes back and forth.

**Wade:** The fact that you came back to go to art school later impels me to ask again about the opinion that you may have—you have already said that it gives pause how many fine arts students there are. What is it that this institution creates, all the many BFA and MFA graduates who are put out there in the world? Not to put George Mason on the spot, but how do you think GMU, in your personal experience, prepares an individual to be an artist, a professional artist, or just an artist in the broadest sense, in the world of commerce, or just in the world where he wants to self-identify as an artist?

**Jay:** I have the feeling that I am getting just about the same sort of education as other MFAs, honestly. They went to RISD [Rhode Island School of Design], and all that. They know just as much as anybody else and they are going to tell me I think just about the same type of things. I don't think George Mason is really all that different from other institutions. It is just how much I am paying compared to the others. You know, I haven't been here that long. As I say, I spend most of my time in my cave, my studio. They are teaching about practical things. You need to know how to price your work. Compared to MICA [Maryland Institute College of Art] or whatever, I can't say they know any better how to price your work.

**Wade:** No, I can't ask you much in the way of market comparisons because you haven't been to all the different schools but...

**Jay:** Well, I just came back from SVA this summer [School of Visual Arts, Fine Arts Summer Residency Program in New York]. I could talk about a lot of the fears of a lot of those people, the things that they are concerned about. There were 60 artists who came to the residency, all in varying places in their careers. The ones that didn't have MFAs were seeming worried and concerned, should I have an MFA?

**Wade:** That is part of what I am asking because I am seeing that in the buzz online. Is it that now in order to make any money at all as an artist you have to have an MFA? Is it like everything else? Do you have to have credentials even to get into a gallery, to find a show, to get into juried competitions? Do you have to have a resume with an MFA in order to get accepted just to be an artist?

**Jay:** There is no clarity on that, I don't think. It doesn't matter what I say because there are plenty of counters [to that argument]. I know that a lot of the artists who I dealt with up there who did not have MFAs were asking me, because I am working on it, you know, "Should I do it?" "Should I do it?" I think it is a case-by-case situation. Whether those credentials really translate, honestly, it is a part of why I am doing an MFA but I also know that the great thing about doing an MFA or a BFA is that you get the audience to look at the work and you get challenged all the time and you come out on the other end a better artist. I guess you could just be a street artist and you don't have any education and then a lot of galleries like your work. One of the artists I met up there, that was her case, but she wants to move into the fine arts realm. She can't make a living by spray painting walls.

**Wade:** You are telling me what a lot of other people have told me in interviews—and what I tend to agree with—that artists have to find out how to become singular any way they can. A good MFA program and a good artist will seek clarity in any way that he or she can. A good MFA program is going to help the artist be a better artist. Any kind of experience where the artist is really trying to be a better artist may do the same thing.

**Jay:** I will say that in either case, educated or not, it requires intellectual curiosity and you have to be an active participant. I know that I read all this and no one says, go read all that. You have to educate yourself. But in doing an MFA they can make a lot of good suggestions on what to read, what artists to look at. I don't know that Dave Hickey's claim about us producing mediocrity is entirely true. I think that because then we get into the value of art itself. The usual thing I say is, if there was an apocalypse, and there were just a few people left, here we're going to need engineers, etc., but somebody is going to have to invent God and give everybody a reason to keep living besides just survival. You're going to need artists. In the case that God did not exist, if you look at the mythologies and all the crap that we focus on, that is how the Bible was written, an artist essentially creating a very complex narrative. I see it with my work and I have seen it with so many other people's work. There is so much to get into. It is like this really deep rabbit hole. I think, how could the Bible be so complex, or holy texts, or whatever?

**Wade:** Moving back to the idea of the lost, recovered or erased and restored paintings, let me ask if there is any thread of myth. Myth is a kind of a loaded word, so I don't want to be blowing things into different proportions, but is there any quality of myth-making in creating a reconstruction in the thing that you do here by taking something that is erased and recreated?

**Jay:** Certainly. I guess we have to define myth.

**Wade:** When you talked just a moment ago about the Bible, what popped into my mind was *Mr. Burns, A Post-Electric Play*, which was produced last year by Woolly Mammoth [Theatre Company in Washington DC] and it's going to be produced in New York by Playwrights Horizons this year. It's a kind of a take-off on a saga, a post-apocalyptic saga about how a group of people over several generations creates a new myth which is based on The Simpsons. The Simpsons becomes a new folk myth based on an episode where they are on a kind of a Mark Twain Mississippi River steamboat. It becomes this huge good/evil thing, basically a new kind of Bible story. The playwright Anne Washburn wrote it. It is a feather in the cap for Woolly Mammoth and I am proud of them for it but it just gave me the sense that there is a way that we all can create myth by taking shreds of evidence of things that were important to us, or things that we found and building up from things that may not have started out as meaning anything at all to the people who were around at the time. They are just shreds, artifacts. They are ephemera that are all that is left. But because they are all that is left they are all that we have to build from. That is what I was thinking and why I asked.

**Jay:** That is actually astute because it is something that I am trying to do. While I am in this modernist system of grids, I am trying to play with strategies of post-modernity, not that it is completely post-modern appropriation. I think it is definitely a strategy used in post-modernity. In any case, I feel like I am appropriating myself. Here is the claim and then here is the erased claim. So, there is accretion and then it creates, like you say, a myth. It creates



this long, vast narrative stretching back to the origin. Yes, I will have to think about that because it makes a lot of sense to talk about myth regarding the way I do these things. I will even parody my titles. I have a painting I think is successful so I have been parodying that title for six paintings after the first. It is making meaning from ephemera created over time. How important was the Venus of Willendorf to those people? And then, now, it's ironic.

**Wade:** It becomes as important as anything else because it's all we've got.

**Jay:** These objects which I think are analogs for humans and analogs for an attempt at creating meaning, creating deities, something as a tether for value, especially after reason says, "Slain God."

**Wade:** I was reading about this guy in Louisiana, not in Texas, but close enough, who is getting a lot of traction for doing atheist revivals. I don't know if you've heard about him. He is doing things in hotels. He basically gets people together and he takes non-believers and gives them that old time spirit but it is completely in a non-believer situation where he says there is no reason why you guys can't get together and feel really good about yourselves just like everybody else. You don't have to believe in God to feel good. We'll just get together and sing and sway do everything but you don't have to believe in God.

**Jay:** The other day someone asked—I was sitting down to have some food and someone asked me to pray. I am not a hardcore atheist, I am agnostic but, you know, I said, well, I'm agnostic, really what I did was just a, "I really appreciated your friendship," sort of prayer. It was just using that bracket, I guess. I thought it was a sweet little experience but I am still not sure how I feel about it because it was in that context that I feel like I was damaged by Christianity.

**Wade:** That is something else, again. I can see ways in which my childhood was brought up short when things didn't turn out true that I thought were true at first. I grew up here in Washington and it wasn't just about religion. It was about government and politics and a lot of different things. In Texas, obviously, there are all kinds of different things you can have as experiences that match up.

**Jay:** One thing I didn't discuss, I probably should. I guess you've probably seen it. The color palette, some of the form looks like street art or urban vocabularies. The reason I am doing that is an analysis of outsider art. It is just trying to squish together trajectories. I thought I would be remiss if I didn't bring that up.

**Wade:** That is written on the Web site, too, I noticed.

**Jay:** I think I am trying to do that because there is the notion that it is really authentic. I think it is just as much as anything but the reason the art world gets so excited about a little community of former slave women, black women making these awesome quilts that look like abstract expressionist paintings, is because of that outsider component and because we think they are being genuine and authentic and the same goes for street art even though it has been so commodified by this point. I feel that if I can create tension and interest at least for myself, maybe others, by putting together flatness of modernity in the grids and modernity—with a big painted dick, because I think there is definitely a lot of "fuck you I exist" in the vocabulary of street and there is a lot of powerlessness. That is where a lot of that is coming from. A lot of the color palette is coming from older paintings where I am trying to synthesize my different trajectories. I used to make paintings with so much white paint. There was one part red paint and one part blue paint. They were just grids. They looked like retinal fatigue. They hurt to look at. It's like arrested retinal fatigue. When you are up close it just looks white but when you stand back it looks like a grid. They work like Agnes Martin paintings. The newest trajectory is paintings on Band-Aids.



Photo courtesy of Jay Hendrick.

**Wade:** Wow!

**Jay:** I like it quite a bit because people have said it is cute. I also think there is an implicit notion of healing. I have a lot of issues with the idea of painting itself so it is a way for me to deal with painting.

**Wade:** When did the idea occur to you to start painting on Band-Aids?

**Jay:** In New York I was walking around so much. I wasn't really taking the subway too much. I thought, I'll take this chance to meet chicks and [laughs] I walked around so much that my feet were literally bleeding. So, I had Band-Aids and then, as I usually do—I don't know if you've noticed—whatever appears in front of me, I put paint on it. Nothing in here [in the studio] was bought. Everything is garbage. Castoff canvasses, cardboard, wood and everything. This is one possibility of how to display them on the elbows and knees of statues. That's in the subway in New York.



Photo courtesy of Jay Hendrick.

That's a little cop statue. That's a station at 14<sup>th</sup> Street. I've been sending them to friends in Berlin. Also, some people in Uruguay and Brazil. I've asked them to put in open and public spaces and where you place them, think about healing. I am also giving them to people, I guess I am making them complicit with my practice, or whatever, I guess it's a relational sort of aesthetic. Let them choose. I think it is funny because they are one-time use. You put it up and there is the ephemera that's leftover.

**Wade:** I'd love to see it take off and become a sort of correspondence art and I'd also love to see it if you could get it mounted. Everything requires maintenance. Everything requires attention. I don't know how much attention you would want to put into it.

**Jay:** I could put them on paper and put it under a frame. I think it would look pretty fantastic. I think I can do an installation with them, like a thousand on the wall. And, of course, public spaces. Washington has a lot of statues. I can go out there and heal. That is another thing. I have never done street art. But I finally did for the first time.

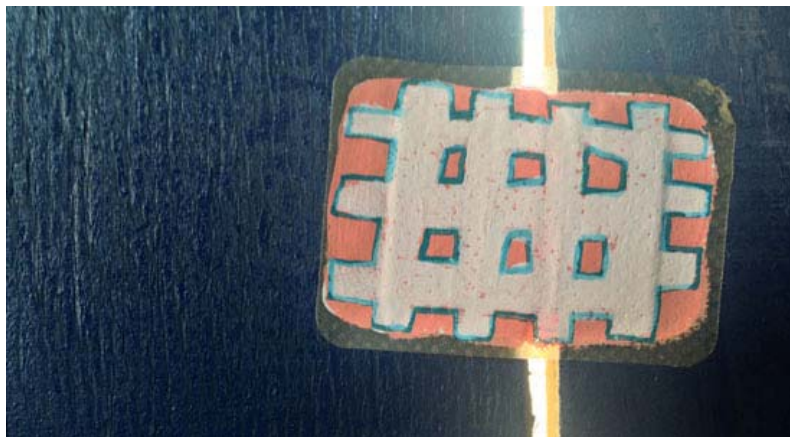


Photo courtesy of Jay Hendrick.

In Chelsea I thought I would bridge a gap between two fences. It's basically one of those Band-Aids where two fences meet. That is one of the newer things that I'm doing. I have all sorts of silly ideas. What I want to do now because I can't go to the opening. Oh, so I can't go because I'm going to Italy.

**Wade:** You're going to Italy? Tough break.

**Jay:** Yeah, but I can't go to the Connersmith opening so I'm thinking about building robot proxies for myself.

**Wade:** To be at the opening?

**Jay:** Yes, to be at openings or just to be at galleries. Mobile, maybe even aerial, because I also want to start making some drones.

**Wade:** Drones would be a bit of a tall order for the upcoming opening.

**Jay:** I also have to learn robotics.

**Wade:** Also, it would be kind of a tough space to get permits being in Washington near Capitol Hill. I suppose if it was tethered it might be a little easier [chuckles].

**Jay:** Well, I have done some research. I would like to make some drones, like graffiti drones, but I think it would be cool to make like a hundred and send them to galleries all over DC because I can't go to all of these—and New York—I can't go to all of these openings, and I want to go. It is not just for my career, or whatever. For me, empathy is a really important thing.

**Wade:** It is from the heart, I can understand the difference.

**Jay:** Yes. For the first time I saw performance art last year at *(e)merge* art fair with Holly Bass. I saw Holly Bass a little while back and I told her how much it meant to me. I was watching a woman watch Holly's performance. I later found out it was Lillian Bayley Hoover who won the Trawick Prize in 2012. I didn't know her at that time, nor have I ever met her since. She had a great smile. She was just completely enamored with Holly Bass's performance. I was just really enamored by her watching. It was really intimate. Our chairs were close to the performance. She was doing the thing where she washed her hair [*Come Clean*]. I felt like I could empathize with the watcher and the performance. Empathy is very important to me. So I do performative actions now, too. I did a thing where I was in the white cube, and I said, "For the next 20 minutes, I will be honest and you can ask me anything." That was the extent of it. I am not saying that it was this autonomous great idea but I had never done anything where, "There's my body and now I'm the work, not like one of these passive things on the wall." The questions were, "What do you fear?" "What do you love?" "What do you hate?" "Do you think this professor is full of shit?" "Have you ever been arrested?" I was hoping they would ask something like, "Have you ever been molested?" "Have you ever murdered anybody?"

**Wade:** You were looking for things that might really scare you?

**Jay:** Yes. And I was honestly interested in what people wonder or really think of us. I thought I might be able to tell some of them what I really think of them if they asked. And are we willing to do that? I don't know. Anyway, I think there are a lot of interesting issues going on with that as an idea. I also thought I could surgically implant Wi-Fi devices in homeless people in New York, sort of a Santiago Sierra approach in making us all complicit. I guess the more Wi-Fi connections they'd get, the more money they'd get.

**Wade:** So that they would become human hot-spots and able to support themselves passively being money makers, you mean?

**Jay:** Something like that. I hadn't thought it through very far. I guess everybody has an idea file that is a mile long.

**Wade:** No. I can tell you that you have more ideas than a lot of people do. But I guess people have already told you that.

**Jay:** This would be expensive, and it has been done, but I want to make a museum out of the bouncy castle material, that is inflatable, you know? Somebody did it at the Guggenheim, but what I would like to do is a white cube. You can bounce around in there and I want to have inflatable paintings. I guess they would look like pillows but they would have my vocabulary. I have been looking around in China and Britain. If I were to get one made it would be around \$20,000.

**Wade:** That is an approachable sum. Obviously, it would take some funding but that is not an outrageous amount of money.

**Jay:** I thought maybe I should do a Kickstarter campaign. Some if it just came from being on the move and saying, goddamn, my feet hurt! It's marble, you know? I guess I could just fill the gallery with pillows and everybody could walk around. I don't know. I've just been talking about future ideas. What else do you want to talk about?

**Wade:** You talked about people that you like and people in your scholarly environment here who have been important. Are there people you have not mentioned already who have been important? I mean people you think are important to the way you are getting better at being an artist. It doesn't matter who they are. It doesn't even matter if they are teachers.

**Jay:** There is one artist. I really appreciate what he does. His name is Richard Galpin. He is in Britain. He does peeled photographs. They are fantastic. You should have a look. It is the simplest thing in the world. He just uses a scalpel, I guess. On photographs. They are geometric abstractions. He had one piece up on the High Line. It is gone now but it was a simulation of one of his pieces. It was just a white piece of metal with little tiny rectangles cut out. When you looked at it from the right spot you were essentially looking at what his work looked like. It was fucking genius. But I have to say that I have really been thinking about performance art lately. You saw the Facebook so you saw me with this [points to painted cardboard headpiece] on my head.



Photo courtesy of Jay Hendrick.

What I would like to do is make something like a business suit out of one of my paintings on canvas and then go get a loan, or something. I haven't figured it all out yet. I am thinking about performance art. I feel it is a way for me to re-contextualize the idea of painting and to find value in it for myself. And I just feel like something embodied really resonates with me right now. That is in large part because of DC artists, actually. Holly Bass, definitely. I don't know her that well. I've talked with her a few times and I have told her how much I've appreciated the performance. And then, Kathryn Cornelius is somebody I think about, actually, a lot. When I was in New York, it is funny, I used DC artists as verbs up there, to talk with those 60 artists [at the SVA summer program]. I would go and look at their work and I would make connections and intersections between them, for example, "Yeah, Matt Sesow is this particular color palette, and he is making these kinds of marks and I think you should look at him." Then, of course, I talked about Kathryn Cornelius quite a bit because I have looked at her body of work. I have not actually met her or seen her work in person but I really appreciate what she does because she is getting at some things that I have to try to figure out myself. At what point does art and life end? Other very, very subtle ideas. I wake up at three in the morning every day just because my brain turns on. I dream about painting and I dream about grids. I had a weird dream about Cynthia Connolly last night showing me a painting on handkerchiefs, I don't know why. I haven't seen her in months. Also, Sam Scharf [subject of a previous *Academy* Q&A] says hi.

**Wade:** I was going to ask you if you knew him because I think his work is great.

**Jay:** I haven't met him but we are friends on Facebook and we've chatted. It is a funny thing. For me, I use Facebook, I don't know if it is a piece or not but I like interacting with people and I have made friends with Facebook. It started out as just chatting on Facebook and then we hang out in real life.

**Wade:** I think it is pretty benevolent. It has been for me.

**Jay:** We are spying on each other. Essentially, we all know that we are complicit with whatever is going on there. I'm OK with it.

**Wade:** That is how I feel about it, too.

**Jay:** I have a friend. All he posts is poetry, like little haikus. I also write poetry and criticism. Unfortunately, a good bit of the poetry is romantic poetry.

**Wade:** I'm not too surprised.

**Jay:** Not with a capital "R."

**Wade:** Well, if you are going to be a performance artist and you like doing things from the heart, that is not far, not a stretch.

**Jay:** I am not sure. My program is two to three years, whatever you want, but I am choosing to do three so that I can experiment, leaving no stone unturned. I just want to do whatever I want to do. Performance, video. I've got video where I wrote down on pieces of paper with food coloring one hundred ideas and then I ate them and spat them out. Then I watched the video and was completely freaked out by all the spit and how strange it all seemed.

**Wade:** You could make papier-mâché.

**Jay:** I don't have any up but I have also been writing aphorisms for some time. I went to a lecture with Jerry Saltz and one of the things he said was that he's not really all that social. He doesn't know that he likes hanging out with artists because all they do is talk about themselves.

**Wade:** That is a possible problem.

**Jay:** And I realize that I'm saying, "...and I want to do this, and I want to do that..."

**Wade:** Fortunately, that is what an interview is for. You are supposed to be talking about yourself. That is one of the great things about these things. It makes my life a lot easier when you do talk about yourself. What are you going to be doing in Italy? Are you going for work, pleasure, a combination?

**Jay:** Yes, with George Mason. Mary Del Popolo and Peggy Feerick are taking some undergraduates and graduate students over there. We are going to stay up in the Tuscan hills and we are going to make work but we are also going to go to the Biennale. I've never been to Venice. I've been to Italy before but I've never been to Venice. It should be really fun, although really hot, probably, in July. I haven't figured it out or not, but I have been given the opportunity to go to Japan. SVA really bore a lot of fruit. I was offered a solo exhibition in SoHo. I think it is conflicting with the Japan trip so I may not be able to do that. I need to figure that out. Then I've got a show in Annapolis that is opening soon at the Maryland Federation of Art – Circle Gallery. There is the Academy show at

Connersmith which is very exciting. Oh and the publications [*New American Paintings* and *Studio Visit*]. It has been a good year publication-wise, I guess.

**Wade:** This is really so great.

**Jay:** I am kind of lucky in that department. To get into *New American Paintings* in my first year of an MFA, I am really lucky. That is in every Barnes & Noble from what I understand.

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[i] *New American Paintings Magazine, Juried Exhibitions-In-Print* ([www.newamericanpaintings.com](http://www.newamericanpaintings.com)). Jay Hendrick appears in *New American Paintings*, 2013 Southern Issue, #106. Miranda Lash, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, New Orleans Museum of Art, was the juror for this issue. Also this year, Jay appears in *Studio Visit Magazine*, Volume 22, 2013, ([www.studiovisitmagazine.com](http://www.studiovisitmagazine.com)). Dina Deitsch, Curator of Contemporary Art at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts, served as the juror for the competition that resulted in this installment of *Studio Visit*.