

John Scane paints walls.

At first glance this might sound like the sort of epithet you would find scrawled on the bathroom wall of a university art department. And for a muralist or housepainter, this statement is nothing but fact. But Scane is not a housepainter, nor does he consider himself a muralist (even though he has been known to paint a mural or two). Not that there is anything wrong with painting walls (even Willem de Kooning was known to paint a few to make ends meet), but in this new body of work created by John Scane, this idea has taken on new significance.

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Now, this is not like it sounds. Scane is painting walls...or more precisely, making paintings of walls. Much like Pop artists who celebrated popular culture by focusing on the 'stuff that surrounds us,' Scane has done the same. Only in this case Scane's gaze has turned to the stuff that literally surrounds us and shelters us...that divides us and unites us. Walls. Deceptively simple, but so ubiquitous they are often overlooked. John Scane's work has often been marked by his attention to that which goes unnoticed. It is as if his artistic sensibility gravitates not towards some endless pursuit of an ephemeral *zeitgeist*, but towards the depiction of things solid, real, and tangible.

It is often noted that artists 'see' things differently than the rest of us. While this is partially the culmination of years of training, there is also that unquantifiable element of talent that enters into the equation. For Scane, his art is centered on the artist's gaze...that ability to 'see' things differently, things that might go unnoticed by others. It is in the act of creation that this gaze, or more precisely the subject of this gaze, is transformed into something worthy of consideration. By applying his talent to the stuff that surrounds us, and is thus more-often-than-not overlooked, Scane allows us all to share his vision. But his talent is not in forcing his vision upon us; it is in creating a space in which we can 'see' that which was veiled from our view. This allows his work to be infused with a meaning that is as personal as it is challenging.

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Walls have surrounded us since we first created shelter. By protecting us they also divide us...by sheltering us they also contain us...by including us they also exclude us. Standing as a silent testament to our endeavor and our aggression, they are often the last tangible witness of Man's effort. Some have withstood the test of time; others have been lost forever and exist only as a fading memory. Jerusalem's Wailing Wall...China's Great Wall...the Berlin Wall...all have left their mark on history but continue to exert a palpable presence on our lives. Walls have also served as a blank canvas upon which our ideas and dreams have been projected. They are structures upon which we display the images and art that we love. In fact, there was a time when paintings were looked at as a window onto the outside world (hence the popularity of landscapes). It was as if the frame marked the edges of a window pane, with the painting the imaginary or idealized view of what the outside world did, or should, look like.

In viewing these well crafted paintings, their beauty is immediately apparent. This accessibility, however, merely hints at the conceptual implications of these works. It is almost as if Scane has visited the Louvre but spent as much time contemplating the walls which house these masterpieces as the artworks contained therein. And in some cases, this is exactly what he has done. In fact, several of these works are recreations of the very walls that preserve some of the world's greatest art

collections. In doing this, Scane both critiques and pays homage to institutions such as the Tate Modern, the Louvre, and even China's Forbidden City. There is no denying that museums represent one of the most effective ways to preserve our artistic heritage. In another way, however, the walls of these institutions represent the stasis and formalization of the very fluid streams of artistic creativity. In leveling his critical eye on such hallowed walls, Scane has placed himself smack-dab in the middle of the post-modernist discourse that is characterized as institutional critique. However, by making paintings that reference the most basic of historical elements, Scane has somehow approached post-modernism through the very tenets of modernism.

For, it is modernism that defines itself as a deliberate divergence from the past...an endless quest for the 'new' and shocking. In the mid-twentieth century it became marked by an intentional and self-conscious attempt at being 'true to the medium.' These paintings of walls, by their very nature, bring our attention to the flatness of both the subject as well as the finished product. But these are not merely a redux of mid-century modernism...these are celebrations of abstraction. It is as if on our behalf, Scane has recognized and truly captured the beauty of walls that are so central to our existence that they often go unnoticed. The nuance, the color, the form, and the wear have been recreated in a lush application of oil and pigment on canvas.

So, John Scane paints walls.

Scane's gaze, however, has not been limited to a narrowly focused institutional critique; the walls that he recreates are as likely to be inspired by a random wall in China marred by centuries of wear, or by the carefully laid bricks that line some of London's more notable thoroughfares. By referencing walls from his travels throughout Europe, America and Asia, Scane brings to this work an intimacy that is belied by the universality of the subject. In recreating these walls, Scane cleverly subverts these notions...of modernism and post-modernism...of abstraction and representation...of inclusion and exclusion. In a most Surreal twist, Scane has created for us walls meant to be placed on other walls. It is almost as if Magritte's paintings of empty picture frames featuring the bricks of their supporting wall, or his landscapes hung in the center of open windows, have come full circle and are finally manifest.

For Scane, walls allow him to explore the idea of pure abstraction while still being firmly grounded in the real world. John is painting real things, real places, real walls. Without explanation these works stand alone as expressions of pure abstraction...of color and tone moving across the canvas. They remind us of something we once saw, maybe, somewhere. But considering how much time we spend looking past, over, and through walls, as opposed to *at* walls, this should come as no surprise. In John Scane, painting is decidedly not dead. It merely has spread its arms in an all inclusive embrace.

Yes, it is true, John Scane paints walls.