

About the artist:

Justin Witte (b. 1977, Grand Rapids, MI) is a painter, curator, and art administrator based in Chicago. He received a MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a BFA from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. His work has been featured in exhibitions at Roots & Culture Contemporary Art Center, Gallery 400, the Elder Gallery (Lincoln, NE), Florida State University Museum of Fine Art (Tallahassee, FL), Vox Populi and Space 1026 (Philadelphia) and the D.U.M.B.O. Arts Center (NYC). He is the recipient of the Pew Fellowship in the Arts and a Union League Civic Arts Foundation Award. He is currently the Director and Curator of the Cleve Carney Gallery at the College of DuPage.

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Exhibition Reception:

Sunday, February 21

3:00 - 5:00 pm

Meet the artist and celebrate *Regenboog Broer* along with concurrent exhibitions.

Hyde Park **ART**CENTER

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 www.hydeparkart.org

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Justin Witte *Regenboog Broer*

Galley 2 & Foyer
January 10, 2016 - April 3, 2016



Zone and Zonen (detail), 2013, mylar, acrylic and oil on board, 48 x 48 inches

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Installation view front facade. Front to back: *Regenboog* (2016), Prismatic tape, dimensions variable and *November*, (2013), Reflective car paint on aluminum, 76 x 68 inches

Hyde Park Art Center invited emergent Chicago-based artist **Justin Witte** to make an immersive installation of geometric distortion, light and color in the Art Center’s Gallery 2. Witte’s past experience with site-specific installations at Moraine Valley Community College (Palos Hills), and Roots and Culture Gallery (Chicago) proved that he enjoys creating work that plays with unique spaces. The result is seen in Gallery 2 and expands to the gridded tape patterns on the windows of the Art Center’s main entrance. **Allison Peters Quinn**, Director of Exhibitions and Residency Programs, asked Witte some questions regarding his art practice, the materials he uses, and his relationship with the Dutch language.

I think of you as a painter first and foremost because of your attention to achieving the right color and your experimentation with brushstrokes. Even your installations seem to be about expanding and enveloping the viewer in a multidimensional saturation of color. Printmaking knowledge is also apparent in the way you push and press color on vinyl. And there seems to be an attempt to make painting sculptural with the cut-masonite board artworks titled brushstrokes. What is your favorite medium to use and why?

I think of myself as a painter, and when answering a question about my preferred material, my instinct is to answer paint, but in all honesty I don't think that is still the case. I love painting because it provided me a platform that allowed, for what seemed to me, endless possibilities in variation: Variation in application, composition, contrast, color, etc. It was this variation—and the space for experimentation it allowed—that pushed me toward playing with different materials. As I have begun to move away from pigment, together with the help of viscous binders, I see it as a logical progression of the experimentation that was at the root of my paintings. What has been great is that the expansion of materials has really freed me up from a lot of the weight (or art historical heaviness) that surrounds a painting practice. I am now most interested when I come across new or unfamiliar materials. I am interested in what is possible with them.

What is the most unlikely material you’ve used and what was the outcome?

Probably a used yoga mat that was part of a series of editions I created in 2011 called *Post*. It was a really important group of work in that it really opened up my use of materials and allowed for some of the things I mentioned above. I have always planned on bringing *Post* back in some form, but I barely have enough time to get a haircut nowadays.

Mark-making is a dominant feature in your work. There is a strong presence of the blot, streak, or smear repeated in all three of the installations that emphasize an organic, even primordial, surface and pattern: the rainbow striations resulting from the prism tape in the entry way, the faux malachite swerves, even the iridescent car enamel. These are all particular color treatments that showcase luminosity.

What fascinates you about color and light and the effects the two cause when intermingled? And what content to you hope it brings to the understanding of your work?

I think materials that capture, reflect, or manipulate light interest me for two main reasons. First is the vibrancy and richness of color possible when dealing more directly with light, and the second is that these pieces shift depending on where the light is, where the viewer is standing, or even what time of year it is (this is something I figured out after installing in the HPAC windows in January). I like the idea that the work can be fluid and changes with each interaction. The content in my work is in the use of the unusual materials and the viewers shifting experience. That hopefully allows for the viewer to slow down and experience the same moments of discovery I did in making the work. So the content is in the material of the work. The brushstroke or mark is something I play around with in my work: pairing hand-painted brushstrokes with printed ones, making laser cuts from my gestural marks in my sketchbook, finding material that mimics familiar mark-making. I think this interests me because it’s playful and also pokes holes in the supremacy of the brushstroke. These moves or decisions are related to my ongoing questioning of the boundaries of "Painting", but they are also playful. For whatever reason, I like the idea of people not knowing the faux from the real because to me it the iridescent car enamel. These are all particular color treatments that showcase luminosity.really doesn’t matter.

The bodies of work you’ve produced over the past decade have varied in terms of the material used and what is being tackled both formally and conceptually. How do you start a work? Is it playing around with materials and seeing where it takes you?

Yes, I definitely play around with materials. I find that a lot of times I will start with a very specific project or piece in mind, then as I start, that initial idea falls apart, but some element of material or discovered effect will present itself. Other times I will just see something out in the world that I want to emulate. The piece on the windows at the Art Center comes from my experience at Adler Planetarium. The Planetarium has amazing front doors with very thick leaded beveled-glass panels. I noticed that when you leave the planetarium when the sun is setting, the entire entryway of the building is bathed in criss-crossing rainbows. It is so simple but so beautiful. It is especially beautiful there as the light spectrum plays such an important role in researching and studying the makeup of the universe.

You refer to your Dutch heritage by titling the show *Regenboog Broer*, or “rainbow brother” in the mother tongue of your parents, but you don’t speak it. How do you relate verbal language to visual language? Do you feel there is a similar intuitive act of interpretation required to understand both?

My dad was born in Holland, and he moved to Western Michigan when he was around 12, I believe. The community he moved into in Michigan was full of other Dutch immigrants, and he and his siblings grew up speaking both Dutch and English at home—a practice that continued as they grew older. Every Sunday and most holidays all of my aunts and uncles (it is a very large family) would gather at my Oma’s for "coffee." The conversation during those coffees would flow between Dutch and English, so I would be able to understand only half of the conversation. Like many children of immigrants I was raised to be very proud of my Dutch heritage, but at the same time, I was not taught Dutch, nor was I really exposed to contemporary Dutch culture. Instead all of the elements of Dutch culture I experienced were really elements of Dutch immigrant culture, which presented an idealized and flattened view of that culture. It was all Delft tile plates, wooden shoes, and salty licorice. My Dutch heritage is this thing I was raised to believe was a large part of who I was, but I honestly had very little connection to the Netherlands or what was actually happening there. Like the conversations at my Oma’s house, it was mysterious and only partially understood. In my work, when I use Dutch for titles, it works to add some of that mystery, but I think it also impedes a quick read of the work. For whatever reason, I have also always been interested in setting up obstacles for the viewer in an attempt to get them to spend more time with the work. Also I just really love how fun the Dutch Language is; I mean, Regenboog? It is just a fantastic word.