

Excerpt from *The Benefit of Friends Collected on Jay Stuckey*

By Carlson Hatton

I visited Jay Stuckey's studio during the hottest weeks of summer that LA had to offer. Situated across from an elementary school and next door to a corner bodega, I was greeted by the informal welcoming committee of older Latino men that stand in front of the liquor store as customers and owners and seem to guard Jay's studio. The clash of cultures offered between the bodega gatekeepers and the studio interior added an additionally charged layer to the work found within.

Child-like and naive are uncomfortable and unavoidable adjectives that Jay's compositionally complex and layered works demand one to contemplate. A somewhat cyclical dialogue that's fueled by contradictions and binary opposition is unleashed in the work. Paradoxical and recurrent themes that drive Jay's work include: expressive marks or derivative lines, child-like figures of limited expression or fundamental raw emotion that could be universal, and possibly should therefore be communicated through the most direct visual language, and flat in all directions or subtly nuanced and layered in ways which reflect how flat and trivial existence can be once the superficial surface is scratched.

The surrounding elementary school and the bodega seemed like the perfect fusion. Jay's work does bear resemblance to remnants of old and new sidewalk chalk drawings built up and weathered by time, mixed with the aftermath of an evening fueled by all the malt liquor and energy drinks any self respecting bodega would have to offer.

A body of fairly large scale canvasses depict orgies, sacrifices, the unfairness of hierarchical systems, and bloody brawls of biblical proportion. Allegories of birth and creation question our defined roles as men and women but also neatly reference the artist's practice. Jay addresses the big questions in life and painting, (perhaps in reverse order), with figurative works that are a few steps beyond stick figures. We can discern men from women, black from white and blond from brunette but the descriptiveness stops there. The works are textured with underlying information of "failed" paintings and collaged with printed imagery that's often nearly obscured and offers the everyday reality of supermarket receipts and to-do lists. This documentation of the mundane heightens an obsessive and violently recurrent mark making that dominates Jay's work. There is a deceptive ease to the work and a wealth of painting history that surprisingly seems to reference Robert Ryman as quickly as it does Guston, Ensor, Basquiat and Darger. Amidst descriptive painting sound effects and stories of the DC punk scene, Jay talked about our collective consciousness and some other Jungian thoughts involving the shadow self. Then he re-counted Julio the refrigerator repair man from a few doors down who commented that, "these paintings are good because they're not really good paintings but they show all the shit that we all go through".