

Defining Americana

By Elizabeth Roncevic

Who is Dave White? Up until a few days ago, the best I could do to answer that question was to tell you what I knew from his bio. He is a UK based painter, who already in his young career has earned himself the distinctive professional catch phrase: “The Warhol of his generation.”

After having a few conversations with him though, as in preparation for this article, I could now go further to say about him that he takes a certain pride in being a typical, down to earth guy, who just so happens to be gaining pop-culture status as one of the leading artists out there in the world today. Seeing pictures of his studio, the workspace portrays his love and commitment to immersing himself in contemporary culture, to modern design, and even to the kitsch. Dave will go as far to describe himself as a hoarder of things: collecting everything from contemporary vinyl toys, skateboards, stickers, Nike sneakers, Star Wars figurines, and myriad others – which you can see in the photo here. Nonetheless though, his studio speaks volumes of his unique tastes, fresh style, and underground influences.

Further which, his passion for this object-collection is very telling, as even with his success, and impressive expertise of his craft and of the art field, which can leave some numb or jaded with time, he is still able to keep his childlike enthusiasm for art alive. And which don't let that fool you either – where some of his work may appear “light” - as an Artist David White is anything but. He is firm in his objective and if anything could be described as being masterfully subtle in his creative execution. So much so that like his studio's “culture” collection, which when viewed individually won't tell you much of a story, but when viewed as a whole, his collection of work does indeed add up to a much greater and significant whole.

And this of course could not have been any clearer than after seeing his most recent collection, which appeared at the Coningsby Gallery in London, and which was also ever-so appropriately titled for this magazine: *Americana*.

ER: What artists, cultural, and media sources have inspired you in the past and in creating this particular body of work?

DW: I am very much a magnet to things I am attracted to and this filters through into my work. When I was studying influences that had a profound effect on me were the likes of Van Gogh, Picasso, Rembrandt, Lichtenstein, Pollock to name a few. This body of work has been a real journey and as a collection appeared very organically, all kinds of influences, and sources have played their part in it's creation from the music of Arron Coplands Appalachian Spring, to the incredible skies of Sedona Arizona which I visited for this series, alongside memories of playing as a child to the inclusion of vintage movies. I totally immersed myself.

ER: How do you work exactly? All of your pieces have an energy and enthusiasm which is revealed within the heavy brush stroke and gestural movement of the work. Recreate the scene of your studio and of how you work for me.

DW: After researching images I will produce a series of drawings and watercolors based on a particular image that I want to take into paint. There is a specific method; I will produce a very spontaneous but accurate painted line sketch using grey oil paint on the linen. Once dry, the painting will begin, I mix everything I need over a period of hours and then take paint to canvas. Spontaneity and dynamism are an honest reflection of my character and this comes through with the paint and application process. Getting to a very trance like meditative state whilst painting is at the core of my work. The piece will appear and disappear, battles won lost and won again, this is how painting is for me, an incredible fight to bring something to life.

ER: How would you define your particular message as an artist?

DW: This series [*Americana*] more than any other is exploring a number of various themes and ideas. All of my work has a connection to childhood and things I hold dear either in life or memory. The classic American imagery of Native Americans and cowboys is something I was exposed to through movies, toys, messages and narrative. Being exposed to this had a profound effect on me as a child. But its not just as simple as making paintings of this: death, love, defense, nobility, pride, dirt, honor, and sacrifice are what this series is about. And I hope this comes across through the works. The ingrained perception of good and bad is turned upside down in this collection.

ER: How would you define Americana?

DW: I would define Americana as a unique way of life which is completely defined by the landscape of survival and existence in ones own environment.

ER: What qualities does something need to fit into the "Americana" category?

DW: For the Americana era I am exploring, there are the obvious references to a specific time and place - objects liveries and color all play their part, however its important to me to trigger the senses with imagery that relates directly, but leaves the viewer asking questions. There is a narrative but never fully revealed.

ER: How do you view the American Dream?

DW: I think the stereotypical romantic view has its place in so many people's lives through nostalgia; each decade is so defined by its look through fashion, music, and style. Personally I think the American dream is too have a good life, in which family and the home are of utmost importance, where opportunity and ideas are rewarded through hard work.

ER: How do you think it has changed in your lifetime?

DW: The world has evolved and changed so quickly with the advances in technology but the core values are still the same.

ER: How do you see America after the death of Bin Laden?

DW: Acts of high emotion and passion were fully evident across the media after the death of Bin Laden; he has paid the price for his crimes. Out of all the sadness of 9/11 America showed an incredible sense of pride and unity-nobility and unification. That's what makes it great and will always do so.

ER: Have you spent a lot of time in America?

DW: I have spent a great deal of time in America, and have visited most cities; New York is my favorite place in the world. LA, Arizona, and SF are a few of my other favorites. I enjoy all aspects from the incredible energy of the inner cities to America's rugged outdoor landscape.

ER: Anything crazy ever happed while visiting the US?

DW: Enough to write a book about! Every time I land in the States the US Immigration takes a particular interest in me and I get the same eye popping look when my passport is scanned. It turns out there is a Dave White really high up on the FBI's most wanted list.

ER: In your Americana gallery, why stand-offs in Western towns? Why cowboys and Indians? Why not cops and robbers?

DW: I feel there is an evident struggle of survival with this era from both sides, both wild and raw, but with completely contrasting viewpoints of existence. However the demise of both is linked to a specific way of life. I am incredibly interested in that.

ER: **A question I always am curious to find out when I speak to an artist is is there one particular piece that you've created that you are most happy with or that you feel best represents you and what you want to be known for as an artist?**

DW: All of my life as an artist, I have a view on my work, which is I am only as good as my last painting and I have never lost that. My relationship with a painting is an intense experience over a period of time, but once it's finished I am onto the next. I guess it is for the viewer to decide but my work has to be seen in the flesh in order to see the depth and richness of the surface and impasto, pictures never capture that.

ER: **In this last exhibit, you have a series of watercolors on paper in which you include a selection of animal works. This is subject matter you explored 20 years ago, and in this series you offer a new dynamic and vigor to the subject. How did you come to decide to tackle this theme in this series once again?**

DW: The importance and spiritual significance of animals is often lost in our culture and runs throughout the life of Native Americans, The beauty, power and magnificence of animals is something I wanted to embrace again, the use of watercolor was so important in their execution. A medium that realizes it's subject through a life of its own, building up over time, through the elements of chance and spontaneity - reflecting the life and unique existence of the animals depicted.

ER: **The *Oriental Daily News* has described you as the "Warhol of (your) generation". That is quite a compliment, how did you feel about the comparison?**

DW: It's a quote that is used a lot and is a nice compliment. There are similarities in some of my work, as in using images from popular culture and similar objects as a subject that fuels both our work, but that's where it stops, I am a painter and don't use any mechanical processes and I would hope my way of using paint is more defining than that comparison. Big shoes to fill mind!

ER: **What will be the focus or subject matter of your next work? What are you working on now? Do you see your work evolving or changing?**

DW: I will be exploring Americana for a while as I have only scratched the surface with where I want this to go. However, I do have some other works and commissions on the go, with an interesting one for the London School of Business based on Galactic Nebula's.