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Peter Gronquist Interviewed by Rob Goyanes

Putting materials under stress.

Oct 25, 2023

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Peter Gronquist, *Sky Line*, 2023. Photo by Peter Gronquist. Courtesy of the artist.

Peter Gronquist has been a painter ever since he was a child: graffiti in New York City; cars in the Bay Area. Currently back in the Pacific Northwest where he grew up, his art includes sculpture, environmental works, and video. His studio is nestled in a forest and has tremendous

windows. Gronquist, the name, comes from Swedish, meaning “spruce twig.” When I visited, he’d been phasing into what some might call material experimentation by engaging themes of deep time, natural versus unnatural, as well as the forces that shape, break, and remake us.

Though he works at monumental scales, the miniscule details in his work hint at secret tensions and torments, ambitions and aches. His invisible billboard, commissioned on the occasion of Converge 45’s biennial exhibition *Social Forms: Art as Global Citizenship*, is currently installed on top of a redeveloped warehouse near the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon. *Manifest*, his recent exhibition at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, was ostensibly a painting show if your idea of painting includes polyurethane manipulated to resemble giant bones and assemblages that require heavy machinery, rose quartz, acids, and ash.

—Rob Goyanes

Rob Goyanes

Your dad, Don Gronquist, was a filmmaker. His films include *The Devil’s Keep* (1995)—about a dying Nazi war criminal who gives a treasure map to his teenage neighbor—*Unhinged* (1982), and *Stark Raving Mad* (1981). Your mom worked as a costume designer on the films. How did this impact you?

Peter Gronquist

Growing up, my parents had lots of impromptu late-night dinner parties with artists, filmmakers, weirdos, and freaks. My dad was friends with Gus Van Sant in the ’80s when he was making fringe, queer, junkie movies in Portland, and I was like, Oh, this is totally normal and acceptable. It helped me know that I really *could* do what I wanted. You could push every envelope, and if you kept pushing, this could lead to some kind of success. Gus and my dad once cut a hole in the wall of my childhood home because they wanted to screen a film in our living room and the projector was too close to the wall.

RG

You grew up playing on the Columbia River too.

PG

Yeah, one side of my life was bohemian chaos; the other was wholesome, outdoors stuff. The Columbia River is one of the most breathtaking places on the planet. It feels like you're not even on Earth, like you don't exist at all. For my sculpture *Missoula Floods* (2023), I sourced one hundred-and-fifty-pound basalt rocks from the edge of the river. I built an automaton that drags these rocks across a painted metal surface that rested on the floor of Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Visitors activated the piece via a handheld remote hanging nearby.



Peter Gronquist, *Missoula Floods*, 2023, metal and boulders from the Columbia River 126 x 258 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

RG

You also inserted tiny titanium rods in those rocks, so they inscribed these fine lines, or what look like scars, into the soft, pink-painted metal.

PG

Exactly. As the paint got scraped away, I applied a chemical solution that instantly oxidizes the iron atoms in the metal. It rusts before your eyes. I was thinking about a puppeteer and his marionette. Instead of strings, I used thick chains; instead of an anthropomorphic doll, I used rocks—the same rocks I climbed on as a child. Those rocks were originally created by the Missoula floods, which are the cataclysmic glacial floods that happened around fifteen thousand years ago, and are essentially part of my own origin story. That’s the puppet that controls me.

RG

Kids loved the automaton. It was like a baroque line drawing at the end.

PG

They were going fucking nuts. After the audience had their way with it, I applied my own, more gestural scrapes with smaller, handheld rocks. It’s a self-portrait; no, it’s an archive—a record of my habits, my compulsions, my failures, but, more importantly, a record of a particular moment in time.

RG

What do you want the role of this art to be in the world, especially as climate catastrophes start accelerating?

PG

I see them as life rafts. I don’t see the work as interactive so much as collaborative. I wanted to emphasize the idea that if we’re all in this together, we need all hands on deck. If we’re drifting toward some bleak future, at the very least we can cling to each other.

RG

It is literally that bleak unless major changes happen.

PG

It’s funny and tragic that it’s probably too late for us. I mean, once the sea life dies, isn’t that it? Phytoplankton in our oceans, which are the bottom of the food chain, make up about sixty-five percent of our oxygen. I think maybe my work, especially the new stuff, is a good allegory for this. I’m

starting to understand that art itself is always just a record of time. Will humans in the future even be around to look at this stuff?

RG

Some might be.

PG

Again, that word “might” is crucial. I have three kids. I think there’s a can-do attitude in regard to problems that arises when making things. It’s like I tell my kids: Figure it out.



Peter Gronquist, *Sky Line*, 2023. Photo by Peter Gronquist. Courtesy of the artist.

RG

This new phase you’ve entered over the last few years includes color fields, giant totemic lights, and monumental pools of vibrating water. What made you seek out new directions? What connects everything?

PG

I've become obsessed with discovering new materials. I don't know why; it's like a sickness. I think the best part of creating is not knowing what's going to happen. The excitement it creates is like a drug. When I have new material ideas, I go into a fever-like trance and fuck everything up.

(*laughter*) I made thirty paintings for the show at Elizabeth Leach, picked six of them, and the rest I obliterated, recycled back into the studio. The studio is like this thing I need to feed in order to stay sane. As far as what connects everything, it's the line.

RG

Your installation for *Converge 45* is a ten-by-twenty-foot piece of stainless steel polished to a mirror finish and installed like a billboard on top of a warehouse. It has a neon line that's like the start of an exponential curve, or an autograph, an event horizon, a scribble. A stroke?

PG

The mirrored billboard reflects the sky in front of it, which essentially makes the piece disappear except for the line. A lot of my recent work has been about the invisible forces surrounding us. I'm taking a common commercial advertising space and dedicating it to the idea of creating for no reason other than to create. Instead of an ad for a personal-injury lawyer or whatever, it's the sky. And the line.



Peter Gronquist, *Signs of Life 5*, 2023, polyurethane, oil, acrylic, latex, ink, quartz, paper, wasp paper, ash, and steel. 100 x 130 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

RG

When I was at your studio, you said something that stuck with me: "Order is a thin, fragile veneer." How do you toggle between order and chaos?

PG

I don't. Chaos wins.

RG

But there's more in your work than chaos, no? Something is holding it together?

PG

It's an illusion. I mean, we're barely holding on as a society. Climate change is really dissolving the veil. I guess I do often refer to my work as controlled chaos. It's like, I know what I'm trying to do, and I know how to control my materials, but it's nice to let them do what they want sometimes. I actually don't have much of a choice.

RG

The dialectic of hard and soft, the androgyny, is the thing about your work I'm most drawn to.

PG

Some of the paintings at Elizabeth Leach had lace. I combined concrete and expanding foam and poured it until it stretched the lace to the absolute limit. I grew up on *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and when I was very young, until I was maybe nine years old, I wanted to be a girl. I dressed in women's clothing pretty often. My family called me Petra. It's funny because this is now a huge topic of conversation, but when I was a kid it really wasn't. My parents were like, Oh, that's just Pete.

RG

There's a muscular, masculine quality to your work, but also a sensitivity, an elegance. Of course, the idea that any qualities belong to a certain gender is total bullshit.

PG

The way I evolved as a kid, slowly dressing and acting more masculine as far as normy society defines it, so did these paintings. The paintings started to grow, fatten, mutate, and become almost like sculptures. They're continually scabbing over, molting, fossilizing. It's like they're living and dead at the same time. I push the materials to these terminal stages of stress, which is when things start to get really interesting.

Peter Gronquist: *Sky Line is on view at Converge 45's biennial exhibition Social Forms: Art as Global Citizenship in Portland, Oregon, indefinitely.*

Rob Goyanes is a writer and editor from Miami, Florida. His writing has appeared in Affidavit, Burnaway, e-flux Journal, Los Angeles Times, and many other places. His work as an editor includes Blacklips: Her Life and Her Many, Many Deaths, published by Anthology Editions. Goyanes lives in Los Angeles.

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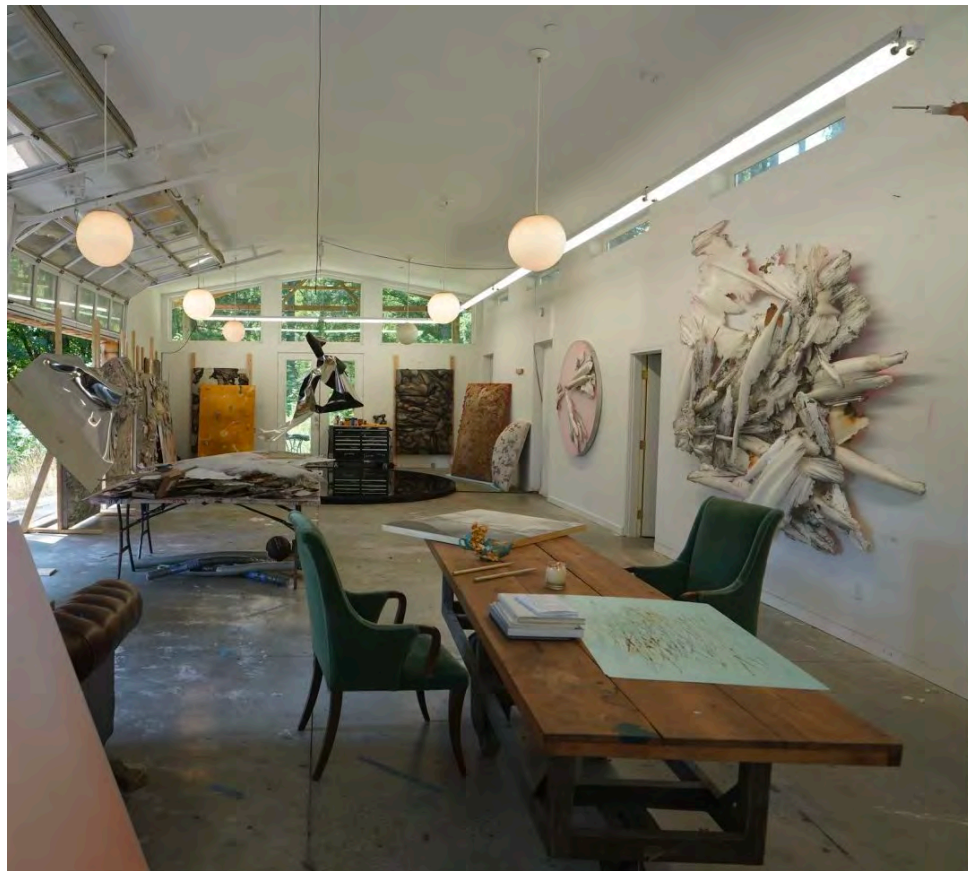
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GREAT ART

Studio Visit: Inside Peter Gronquist's New Show (You Should See It)

We paid a visit to Gronquist's art space to learn about his "geology period," now on view at Portland's Elizabeth Leach Gallery through September 2, where you too can "draw" with boulders.

By Matthew Trueherz • August 8, 2023



Peter Gronquist's art studio in the West Hills

IMAGE: MATTHEW TRUEHERZ

OUTSIDE THE STUDIO of artist Peter Gronquist in Portland's West Hills sits a burned out car covered by a loose tarp, upturned skateboard ramps, a boulder on an industrial car jack, and four hefty stones hanging from chains on a carport-sized metal frame, which are

dragged via remote control across a metal plate to “make line drawings,” Gronquist says. “It’s a drawing automaton based on the Missoula floods,” and the centerpiece of his show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Which is to say that calling Gronquist a “multimedia artist” doesn’t quite describe the situation.

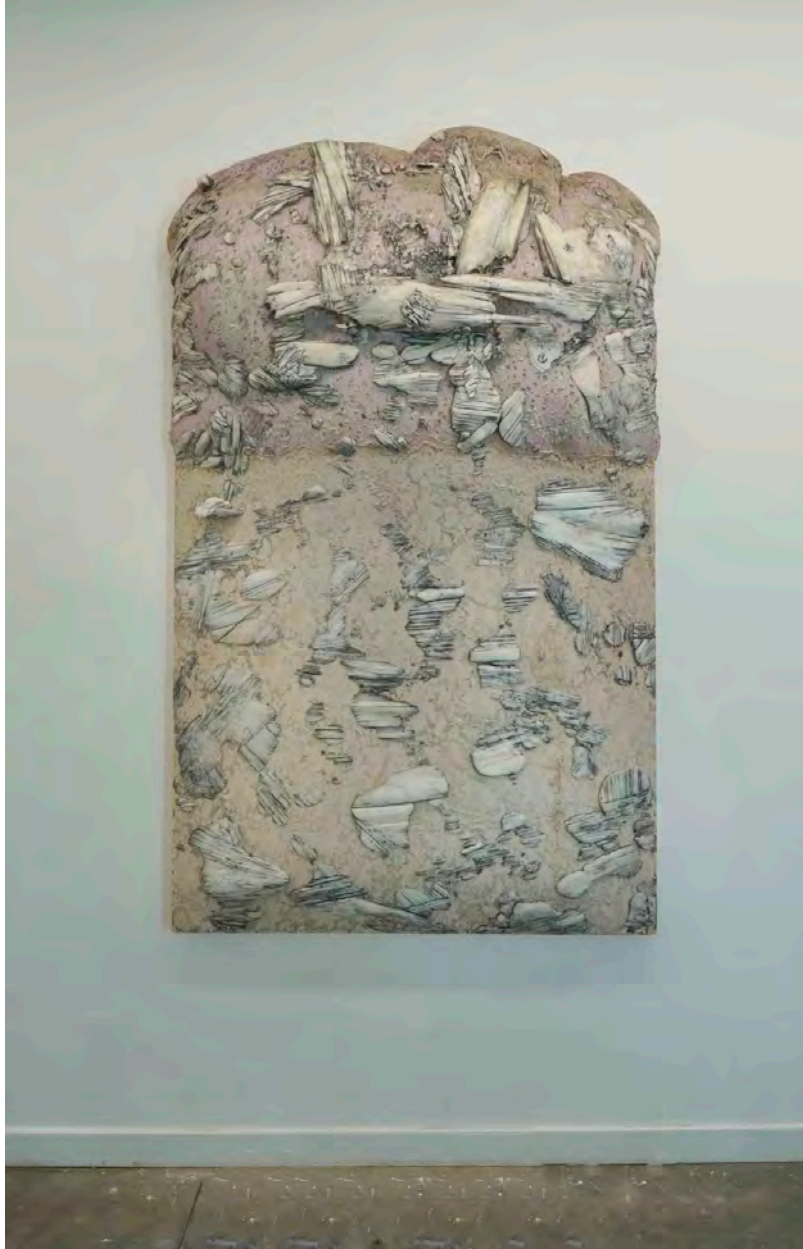
Earlier in his career, Gronquist gained acclaim for a series of sculptures that “mocked American culture and consumerism”: taxidermied deer with gilded Gucci antlers; a gold-plated rocket launcher with “CHANEL” stamped across its barrel; an AK47 wrapped in Burberry check. At the time, this explicit social commentary was somewhat in line with the work of Tom Sachs and Charles Krafft, and produced by a guy in his late twenties living in New York City and Oakland digesting his surroundings.

He feels very distant from that work today, he says, sitting in a baroque, green velvet chair in his studio, a high-ceilinged pole barn roughly the size of a five-car garage. His current work is much more formally complex, and reflects the life of a 44-year-old guy who spends a lot of time in nature and reading up on the geological end of the Ice Age.

For a 2018 project titled “[A Visual History of the Invisible](#),” Gronquist suspended a 50-by-50-foot sheet of silver spandex fabric above the Columbia River Gorge in Cascade Locks to capture the shape of the wind, because otherwise “you never see it,” he says. “You see what it’s done. You see erosion. You see it in mass, tragic events, like hurricanes or tornadoes; but, just everyday wind, you don’t see.” Capturing what we all know but can’t describe is the sentiment that has rippled through his work since, in his attempts at recording the imperceptible across mediums and subject matter.

His current show, [Manifest](#), finds Gronquist dancing along the tension between refining craft with new materials and spontaneously manifesting elaborate ideas that “couldn’t possibly work, but somehow do.” The show includes the boulder line drawings and an automaton with which attendees are encouraged to “draw,” as well as what Gronquist calls “geological self-portraits.” These sculptural paintings resemble the earthy findings of archeological digs, and represent his own bones. The six large paintings were made by casting concrete—a hundred pounds each—inside traditional painter’s stretcher bars wrapped in a lace you might find in a

bridal gown instead of canvas. From there Gronquist adds additional bone-like fragments cast in expanding urethane foam, and then begins painting.



A "geological self-portrait" by Peter Gronquist

IMAGE: MATTHEW TRUEHERZ

The series is autobiographical in that the works correspond to stages of his own life. "I was very feminine as a kid," he says. Thus, the first few works more prominently feature lace, with small bits of concrete seeping through and hardening. As the series progresses,

bones, some with tattoos—a miniature Wu Tang symbol, a rainbow, a spider web—akin to Gronquist’s own, appear. The concrete grows more prominent as well, “in some places completely destroying the lace,” he says.

Instead of catching the wind, in this series, he’s documenting the tension of aging, cataloging the self that we all hold in our head, in the form of literal concrete memories. “You know when a bone breaks, and it grows back together, and there’s this constant sort of healing over traumatic experiences?” He presses a thumb into a painted bone.



Another of Gronquist’s “geological self-portraits”

IMAGE: MATTHEW TRUEHERZ

In the later pieces, the lace is gone. The largest work in this show (automaton notwithstanding) forgoes the rectangle of a “canvas” altogether. It’s roughly five feet square, and assembled from bones larger than any human’s, felted wool, and “bark”

peeled from decades of flyers stapled to telephone poles (“little forgotten subculture histories”). It’s as organic, damaged, and healed-over as any human. “It’s like a life raft,” he says, “of just—you know—*everything* from my life.”

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A Visual History of the Invisible: The Art of Peter Gronquist

Weather patterns, the branching networks of cyberspace, snow crystals, the changing qualities of light, the rules governing geopolitics, the shape of the wind. None of these things are readily visible to the naked eye, but artists and scientists have spent centuries attempting to give form to these and other invisible phenomena. Titian is thought to have illustrated one edition of Vesalius's treatise on anatomy in the 16th century; miniature painters wrote and illuminated major works on the moths of England in the 18th; in 1878, Eadweard Muybridge photographed a running horse, thereby fixing movement as light on paper. In the late 20th century, Marcel Duchamp turned art's ability to trace the contours of the imperceptible into a creative dictum—artmaking is making the invisible, visible.

In our time, one West Coast artist, the Portland, Oregon-based shape-shifter Peter Gronquist, has become particularly attuned to the mysterious, the indiscernible and the visually elusive. After finding early success as an artist who investigated one of the world's most readily visible phenomena—runaway global consumerism—Gronquist switched gears and aimed his keen visual intelligence at even more ubiquitous if veiled manifestations. His explanation for the shift was that he wanted to make things that made him feel, as opposed to those that made him think. Among those “things” was one especially crystalline object-cum-experience: *A Visual History of the Invisible* (2018). Encountering it in one of its various guises is akin to seeing colored musical notes when listening to Mahalia Jackson's recording of *Summertime*.

Gronquist's synesthesia-inducing idea was simple but required significant engineering. The artist used steel cable to hang a 50 x 50 square foot, 200-pound sheet of silver spandex over a gap set between two rocky outcroppings on the Columbia River Gorge. The wind—an element that despite its remarkable force often remains invisible to human sight—did the rest. If it sounds easy, it wasn't. Gronquist successfully raised his enormous emergency blanket in the face of stiff breezes only on the third try. Previously, the cable he used broke, not once but twice, sending his reflective sheet tumbling into the river like a massive parachute. Not unlike strong mountain gusts, scale turns out to be another important force to be reckoned with.

As seen in the artist's poetically titled video recording of the event, Gronquist's XXXL sheet of silver spandex does far more than just hang idly in the manner of a static picture (Gustave Caillebotte's 1892 painting *Laundry Drying, Petite Gennevilliers* comes to mind). Instead, it billows like a huge curtain, flutters like a giant flag, and swells like a ship's sail according to the direction of various airstreams. The intensity of those airstreams, in turn, gives literal form, shape and sound to the fabric's movements in a way that speaks to both the changing conditions of viewership—the differences between experiencing Gronquist's video and Caillebotte's painting, for instance, couldn't be starker—as well as to the power of nature's complex if hidden energies.

Leonardo's quip about simplicity being the ultimate form of sophistication goes a long way in describing Gronquist's work in its various iterations: it exists as a seven-minute video, an actual 50 x 50 foot sheet of silver spandex, and as a set of documentary photographs that the artist is determined not to sell (“I don't sell photographs,” he told this writer). But besides serving as a significant milestone in the artist's career, *A Visual History of the Invisible* also points backwards and forwards toward other artistic milestones that look past impressionism, and late 20th century developments like Earth Art, at what the uncompromising conceptualist Hans Haacke has called the “hypercomplex systems.” An exploration of a natural force in a specific landscape, Gronquist's powerful artwork also alludes to more expansive concepts like weather, climate and atmosphere as a rapidly changing set of facts but also as a powerful symbolic representation of the same.

The unlikely referencing of the determinedly political Haacke might seem odd in assaying the work of a sensualist like Gronquist, but the German's early sculptures channel a decidedly phenomenological drift that bear mentioning when considering the work of the American. Works like *Condensation Cube* (1964), a sealed Perspex box that creates condensation according to the light and temperature of its environment, and *Blue Sail* (1964-65), a square blue tarpaulin weighted in the corners and blown from below by a fan, don't so much suggest antecedents for Gronquist's rippling fabric (the Oregonian only recently became aware of Haacke's early work) as establish an important alliance across six decades of art making. Like Gronquist's versions of *A Visual History of the Invisible*, Haacke's works from the late 1960s explore the interactions of physical and biological systems, while fundamentally departing from the notion of the work of art as a static object animated only by the interaction of the viewer.

Working in a manner that, to paraphrase Andrea Fraser, represents the extensive interplay between what is inside and outside the field of art, Gronquist's action, video and objects—he has additionally generated a series of wind-inspired wall-mounted sculptures titled *Wind Memory* from fabric, resin and silver oxide—tap into an understanding of air and other natural forces as matter and medium. A microcosm of a series of meta-problems affecting the cultural, the scientific and even the political sphere, the Portland-based artist's efforts also tap into debates around climate change and the new epistemologies being conceived currently to imagine humankind's fundamental geologic transition from the Holocene to the Anthropocene.

Attuned not just to events inside in the studio, but to elements outside of it, Gronquist mobilizes a sensibility that is at once environmental and painterly. A 21st century plenairist in the manner of the Catalan Perejaume, the American artist—who began his career as a figurative painter and has become a purveyor of moodily expressive color field paintings that are often augmented by custom-programmed LEDs—has made of landscape, and especially of the light and air of the Pacific Northwest, a recurring subject that is explored through various media. That proliferating media, whether painting, sculpture, photography, installations, video or interventions into nature itself, has itself become a signature of Gronquist's search for phenomena that remain, stubbornly, unseen. In the artist's own words, his project has become a poetic history of the invisible, “a monument to the invisible element, to forces that shape the earth in the most undeniable way.”

Christian Viveros-Fauné
Brooklyn, 2020

Artists at Winston Wächter gallery construct enticing ‘Summer Dreams’

Originally published July 30, 2018 at 9:07 am | Updated July 30, 2018 at 9:09 am



1 of 4 | Electric Coffin, installation image, 2018, various media, from the “Summer Dreams” exhibition at Winston Wächter Fine Art. (Courtesy of Winston Wächter Fine Art)

Artists in Winston Wächter’s current show construct light-infused, dreamlike visions of “Summer Dreams.” But there’s also a feverish focus on exuberant color, artifice-laden compositions and perceptual plays that slip back and forth across the thresholds between reality and fantasy, nature and culture.

By [Gayle Clemans](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

Exhibition review

What do “summer dreams” look like for you? In the Pacific Northwest, we might think of light-flecked water, sun-dappled forests and dry days at long last. There are hints of this in the light-infused, dreamlike visions from the artists in Winston Wächter’s current show. But there’s also a feverish focus on exuberant color, artifice-laden compositions and perceptual plays that slip back and forth across the thresholds between reality and fantasy, nature and culture.

Artist and writer Amanda Maniach, who recently had a solo show at Winston Wächter, curated this smart, eye-popping exhibition, choosing one art-design group and three artists whose pieces clearly play well with each other while skipping off in their own directions.

Seattle-based Jennifer Zwick’s large, vibrant photographs set the stage for how we construct and experience visual pleasure. A multidisciplinary artist, Zwick carefully creates scenes infused with color and pattern that invite us to look and look again and then think about what and how we’re seeing. In her series titled “Exercise in Formal Composition,” Zwick forms triangles out of rich dark soil and abundant flowers, playing with the notions of positive/negative space and figure/ground relationships. I love that she makes right triangles, common in design templates and construction tools, which generate both balance and dynamism. But of course what really matters are the tensions she creates between logic and sensation and between formal simplicity and optical/conceptual complexity.

Portland-based Peter Gronquist also sucks us into absorbing visual experiences. While Gronquist works in a variety of media, he is represented here by two of his large kaleidoscopic mirror pieces. “Peonies” and “Ferns” are embedded with artificial flora that is reflected again and again, receding into a dark space that isn’t really there. Yayoi Kusama’s “Infinity Mirrors” — on view last summer at the Seattle Art Museum — are an obvious reference, with the immersive, endlessly refracted imagery. But there’s an edgy elusiveness to Gronquist’s work that sets it apart. In fact, the pieces are set apart, decisively framed on the wall, edged by light and lines, creating portal-like spaces that don’t really lead anywhere or take us out of the actuality of looking. We’re aware of

what's inside and outside of the frame; we take in, but can't quite grasp, the almost hallucinatory geometry and the telescopic wonder of it all.

Neon Saltwater is both the artistic name adopted by Seattle-based artist and interior designer Abby Dougherty and the name of the ethereal, neon-infused world she creates. Her digital renderings of arcades, spas and beachy motels are completely engrossing with their almost-real textures, slick lines and myriad reflections of lights. These cool, gorgeous, lonely spaces conjure up associations with both the futuristic perfection of virtual worlds and vaguely seedy memories of glamorous vacations and escapist activities. Neon Saltwater has extended elements of these images into the real space of the gallery with architectural décor panels — complete with plastic safety bars — and a party table laden with brightly colored, sweetly scented drinks and treats. It's not that she crosses lines between artifice and reality, desire and detachment; she erases them.

The Seattle-based collaborative group Electric Coffin presents a boisterous conglomeration of 2-D and 3-D work with repeating symbols and slogans related to travel, culture-nature fusions and an almost manic sense of fun, longing and loss. It's like stumbling across a kitschy-hip, roadside convenience store with a fantastic inventory of souvenirs. A short list of their materials includes paint, wood, stone, plastic, encaustic, acrylic (lots of acrylic), glass, various metals and, last but certainly not least: brightly colored flocking, which they apply generously to towering trophies and striking animal sculptures. The tigers, wolves and bears that appear again and again in different media embody the mysterious power and beauty of the wild. But they also serve as beasts of burden; strapped to their backs are bulky space shuttles, slogan-incised pagodas and blocky delivery trucks — emblems of exploration, yes, but also expansion, appropriation and consumerism. Electric Coffin's stacked signs, hand-painted in bubble-gum colors, echo this irony with their glossy, iterated messages: "Stay Wild," "Lost Utopias," "Middle of Nowhere."

As we settle into summer, maybe heading off on a road trip or out into nature, we might dream of idyllic moments of suspended time, total escape or satisfying wholeness. The artists of "Summer Dreams" construct enticing, delightful, wistful glimpses of what is both possible and impossible.

"Summer Dreams: Electric Coffin, Peter Gronquist, Neon Saltwater, Jennifer Zwick," 10 a.m.- 5 p.m., Mondays-Saturdays, through Aug. 22; Winston Wächter Fine

Art, 203 Dexter Ave. N., Seattle; 206-652-5855, winstonwachter.com.

Gayle Clemans is an art historian, critic, and novelist. Connect with her on Twitter or Instagram [@gayleclemans](https://www.instagram.com/gayleclemans)

**Now More Than Ever: Artist Peter Gronquist In Conversation
With Noah Becker**



Artist Peter Gronquist in the studio.

By NOAH BECKER October, 2018

I've always thought about contrast as being the most powerful thing an artist can harness to make their work. Contrast is a skill and contrast is a gift - it creates magic and electricity and separates good art from great art. The best artists are masters of contrast. Peter Gronquist makes dramatic works of art that have this aspect of contrast that I'm talking about. It's like Billy Name saying Andy Warhol had the power to "Throw lightning" - some artists have this power, not all.

I thought for a while about Gronquist's work relating to other artists in terms of influence and style and I came to the conclusion that his work is deeply original. Gronquist's work also flips a range of psychological switches in viewer's brains. Experiencing a Peter Gronquist is an almost spiritual experience and the artist (though apparently non-religious), is ok with this aspect. It was at this point that I was eager to speak with Gronquist directly about his motivations for making art...

Noah Becker: Where were you born?

Peter Gronquist: Portland, Oregon.

Becker: Did you have an epiphany at some point and start making more ambitious pieces?

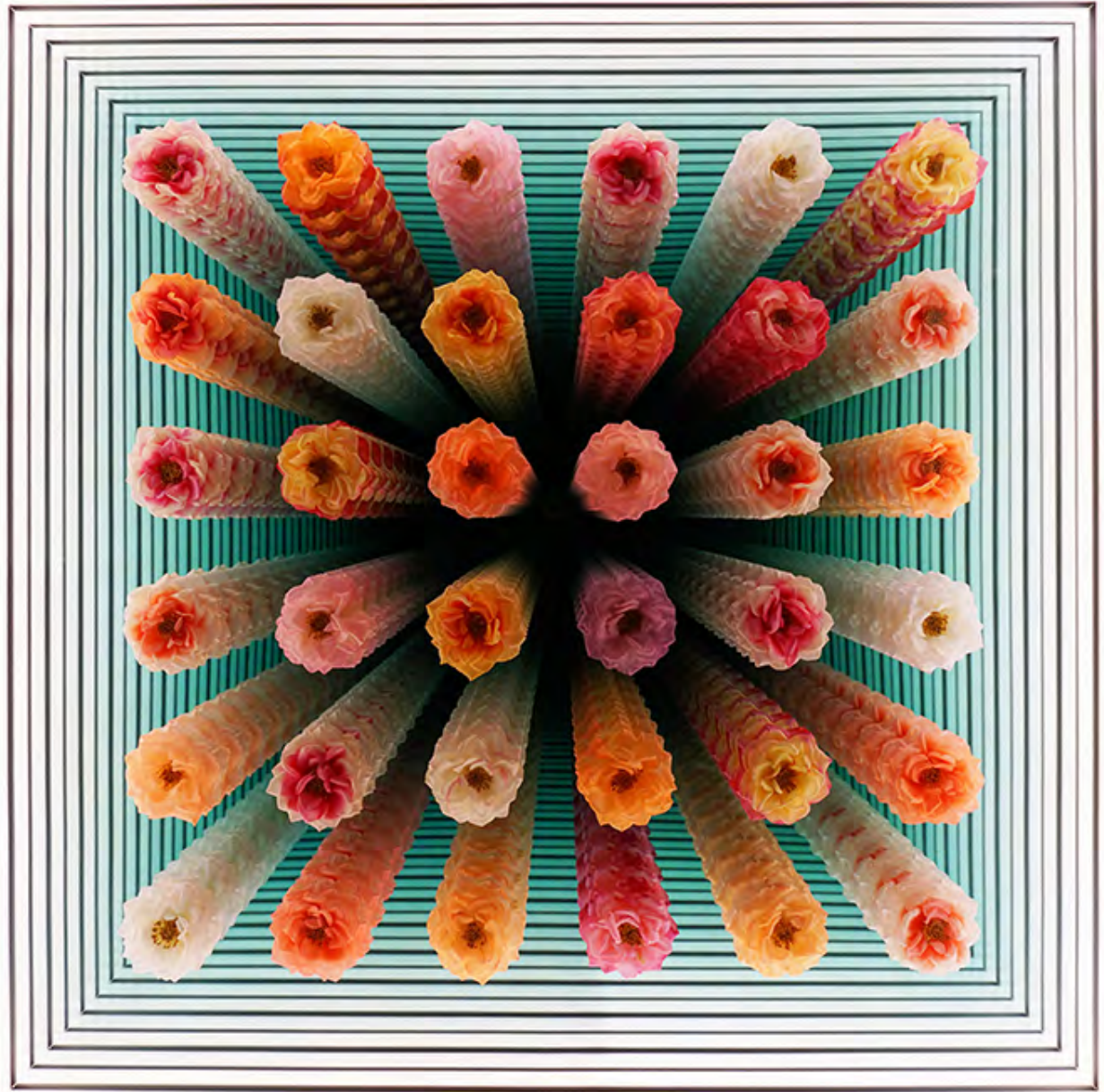
Gronquist: Yes actually. My daughter was stillborn 7 years ago. The experience changed my life, and completely altered my work.

Becker: In what way?

Gronquist: It made me search for what really mattered to me, and pushed me to make exactly what I wanted.

Becker: And this is a different situation for you then in past years?

Gronquist: Yes, I was a figure painter my entire life. When she died I painted her portrait, then haven't painted anything representational since.



*Orlane 36 (infinity mirror), 2017, Hand dyed silk flowers, mirrors, glass, LED's
and aluminum frame, 60 × 60 × 8*

Becker: And how do you think about painting now?

Gronquist: I paint in only color now. My paintings have always been my most cherished and personal pieces, and now more than ever.

Becker: Were you always working in sculpture?

Gronquist: That started more in my early 20s. Before that I was mostly painting.

Becker: Tell me about how you start to think of materials for a piece?

Gronquist: Hard to say. I have thousands of notes of things I want to make.



Immortals 1, 2016, Porcelain, aluminum, 24 karat gold, 18 × 8 × 6 in; 45.7 × 20.3 × 15.2 cm

Becker: That's a lot of ideas!

Gronquist: Yes for sure, I constantly have ideas that I don't know how to make. I have fallen in love with exploring new mediums.

Becker: So it kind of put you in a situation where you have to figure out how to make something.

Gronquist: Yes, I like problem solving.



Pink and Blue, 60"x60", acrylic, enamel and plexiglass. 2016

Becker: Is there a narrative to the use of animals in your work?

Gronquist: I don't really want to talk about the taxidermy - I'm so far past it at this point.

Becker: Your work seems like it takes months of planning and preparation and sorting through all your ideas. How long does it take you to locate the right idea for a sculpture?

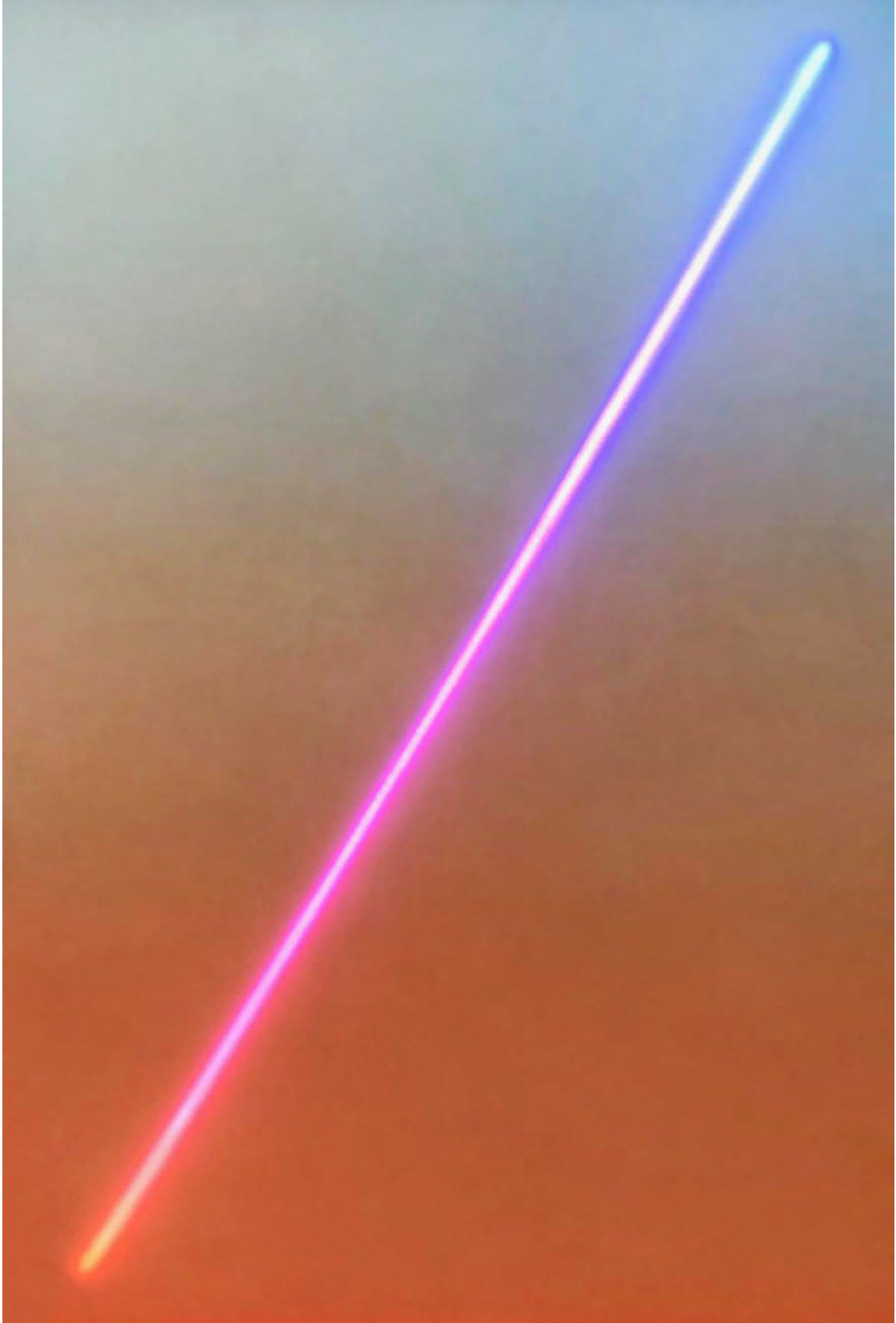
Gronquist: I think what takes the most time is the figuring out the materials, there's a lot of r&d that goes into these series, usually years of perfecting them.

Becker: So you kind of wait for something to enter your consciousness?

Gronquist: Sometimes I'll have an idea that doesn't materialize for years.



Scribble 2, 2017, Acrylic, enamel, plexiglass, 46 × 72 in; 116.8 × 182.9 cm



Light vs. Paint 3, 72"x96" acrylic, enamel, LEDs, rubber and plexiglass. 2018

Becker: I see.

Gronquist: For example, my *Immortals* series (exploded molten aluminum and ceramic sculptures), I've been dreaming about making for about a decade.

Becker: Are there other artists that inspire your work? Your work is very original and memorable; I couldn't compare it to other artists right away.

Gronquist: It's hard to say, especially since my work goes in so many directions. I would say with my paintings I'm influenced by Turrell and Rothko and somehow Flavin.

Becker: Solid influences...

Gronquist: Yes and my *Wind Memory* series obviously draws comparisons to Cristo but I don't think it's really inspired by him. Subconsciously I'm sure many people inspire me.

Becker: What do you want the viewer to experience after seeing your work? Or are you not thinking of the effect your work has on audiences?

Gronquist: My paintings are supposed to overwhelm - they seem to vibrate in person, and your eyes can't focus on them.

Becker: In what way?

Gronquist: They can be disorienting. For me they are incredibly religious (I'm atheist otherwise) and calming.

Becker: That interesting that your work has that dichotomy.

Gronquist: Yes, but The question I'm asked most is "where do they plug in?" The answer is that they don't - except the ones that do. **WM**

INSIDER

15 New Sculptures, Paintings, And Photos That Have The Art World Buzzing

Jennifer Polland and Max Rosenberg Mar 7, 2013, 11:48 AM

This taxidermied deer head by Peter Gronquist was a favorite at the Scope art fair in Miami.



Courtesy of Nick Vlcek

Interview with the American artist Peter Gronquist



*Peter Gronquist, Untitled, 2014, oil enamel, lace, resin and acrylic on plexiglass, 48x48 inches,
Photo by Natalie Poette*

By DEIANIRA TOLEMA, NOV. 2014

Peter Gronquist is an American artist represented by the Joseph Gross Gallery in NYC. Over the years he has become known for his taxidermy pieces, both realistic and surreal. In a bold departure from his former approach to contemporary art, Gronquist is now exploring a new path that revolves around abstract painting. His gestural brushstrokes create a conceptual background that transcends form and meaning. He also plays with perception and three-dimensionality by pointing towards a hidden third dimension whose structure lies behind the surface.

Deianira Tolema: How did you start making art and developing a recognizable style?

Peter Gronquist: I started making art as a young child. Both my parents have always had a predisposition for art and creativity, so I think that contributed to mold me artistically at an early age. I have a self portrait that I made when I was five years old. It says: "I want to be an artist." I began to develop my style after I left art school, although I didn't necessarily have a point of view of my own until that time. My style actually consists of a variety of different styles because the main objective for me is to experiment with different mediums and concepts (I'm fascinated by both new ways of reproducing the images that I have in my head and new materials).

Tolema: What's the difference between making art and producing a sellable product?

Gronquist: Ideally I like to make whatever I want and hope that the result will be well received. I definitely make work that I would want to see, but sometimes we have to walk a line (when I realize that I'm suddenly not making art for myself anymore I know it's time to change things up). The current show is a perfect example of what I'm talking about. I could go on selling taxidermy forever, but the bottom line is that I'm constantly trying to exceed my own goals to be able to set new ones.

Tolema: You are from Portland, Oregon and you are also represented by some of the most interesting contemporary art galleries, like Shooting Gallery in San Francisco and Joseph Gross Gallery in NYC. Would you tell us more about the path that you've been through so far?

Gronquist: I grew up in Portland, moved to NYC when I was 18 and went to SVA. Then I attended the San Francisco Art Institute for two years, moved to Oakland and began to make art. Recently I've moved back to Portland with my wife and two children. My work has been displayed in hundreds of shows later and I really do enjoy working with these gallery owners and directors, mainly because they believe in me and my vision.



Untitled (detail), 2014, Peter Gronquist, mixed media, 30x30 inches, Photo credit Natalie Poette.jpg

Tolema: Who came up with the idea behind your past show hosted by the Joseph Gross Gallery in NYC?

Gronquist: I've been wanting to get back to painting for some time, now. When my taxidermy work took off about five years ago I almost decided to stop painting. I mean, I still painted every now and then, but it was kind of pushed aside for a while, so when my new abstract gestural works started to sell really well, Joseph Gross offered me an all painting solo show at his Chelsea gallery (this is basically what happened).

Tolema: Does your work have anything to do with history of art and aesthetics or what is it about, exactly? Surely it seems to have a deep connection with the American culture.

Gronquist: It depends on which work you refer to specifically. Everything I do is directly related to my passion for art and my subjective experience of reality. I spent my whole life walking museums and looking at any kind of art to absorb as much as possible, so that influence is undeniable. My boldness in style is indeed a reflection of my Americanism (a lot of my earlier work parodied American macho culture and my taxidermy work surely speaks to my American northwest upbringing).

Tolema: So what is art supposed to be about nowadays, in your opinion, especially in a city like New York, where artists, art dealers, auction houses, art writers, collectors and gallery owners have the power to dictate the direction of the art market not only here in the States but also in the rest of the world?

Gronquist: I don't pretend to know what art is supposed to be about. I just like to manipulate matter itself to create alternate realities. It's amazing to think that I can visualize something in my head and then turn it into a perceivable object. Anything else is secondary.

Tolema: Do your new works represent a renovated level of freedom and sincerity that you weren't able to express properly with your former representational works?

Gronquist: Yes, I think that leaving the figurative and representative painting has been very liberating. When my baby daughter died a couple of years ago, I abruptly left the figure and started focusing on more abstract works. I feel like when you paint a figure or an object, the piece usually ends up revolving around that particular subject. Leaving this concern behind allows me to paint pure emotion and is the most sincere thing that I can do. It induces painting to be more about "pure things" (light, color, movement, surface, and a rawness that was not yet well defined in my earlier work).

Tolema: What about the future?

Gronquist: I'll be showing with the Joseph Gross Gallery in March 2015. **WM**

Entertainment

Gradient Paintings Reflect on the Emotional State

Peter Gronquist seeks 'Refuge' in his new series of meditative paintings.



By [Hannah Stouffer](#)

July 18, 2016, 10:38am [f Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Snap](#)

PETER GRONQUIST, GLITCH 2, 84"X60", ACRYLIC ON PANEL. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

For [Peter Gronquist](#), his most recent body of work *Refuge* for [Joseph Gross Gallery](#) was created in response to a close personal death he experienced. The works on view radiate warmth and vitality through subtle gradients and structural manipulations of the surfaces. For Gronquist, this exploration was a needed departure from past work he had done.

He tells us, “These paintings came from an emotional place, I wanted to create spaces that make me feel warm.” The energy that went into his most recent body of work radiates his emotional intention, offering a transcendental or a meditative pause for viewers.

“My sudden shift from representational to abstract happened a few years ago immediately following the death of my baby daughter,” says Gronquist. “Removing representation from my paintings wasn't really deliberate, I was

just painting. Removing the narrative that comes with figure painting just allows me to paint more simply, and I think more purely.”

His transition to creating minimal gradient paintings was an intentional shift as he experimented with the subtle warmth and feelings that his palette gave off. “I play with colors until I feel them somewhere in my stomach when I look at them, it's hard to explain,” says Gronquist. “It's like I'm searching for a certain frequency that isn't right until it is. Sometimes I use opposite colors in my gradients. My favorite color in nature is the grey between orange and blue at dusk, often I'm looking for that color, grey without being drab or heavy.”

PETER GRONQUIST, WARM PLACES, 48"X72" OIL, ACRYLIC AND FABRIC. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

His personal practice has become a necessary element in his daily routine. He explains, “I work basically nine to five, Monday through Friday. I have three kids so that's what my schedule has to look like now. My process changes from painting to painting, and I usually work on five to 10 pieces at the same time. I think that, especially with a cohesive body of work or a show that this allows the paintings to really inform each other.”

PETER GRONQUIST, MASTER CLEANSE, 48"X90" OIL AND ACRYLIC. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

As an artist that changes mediums frequently and fluctuates between different realms of artwork, Gronquist tells us, “I wouldn't say there is any thread that necessarily ties all my work together, other than that it came from me.”