

“Fantasy also exists in thinking about how we can make the art world more inclusive and less hierarchical. I fantasize about making the art world operate in a more similar way to music and club settings.”

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Jake WALKER

Jake Walker is a British fine artist and DJ based in London. His abstract artworks are visually recognizable due to the use of overlaying textured brushstrokes that act as the painter’s translation of sounds and movement. Indeed, Walker’s background in ballet and career as a DJ influenced his creative sensibility, slowly blurring the lines between his different practices as they started to feed into each other. Aiming to build bridges between fine arts and club spaces, Jake Walker is on a mission to create socially engaging experiences through painting. He talked us through his take on the art world and shared details on the creative process behind his painting, the links he fosters between different creative vectors, and how he infuses his utopian fantasy into his work.

Dance and movement have strong influences on your work. Can you explain why and how they are manifested through your practice?

JAKE WALKER: Recently, my art has been spread across paintings, drawings and artworks meant to be projected in club spaces. In the past, I have made works around dance and some collaborative choreographic projects. I also trained at the Royal Ballet School, which definitely

influenced my work in fine art. As someone who makes music and DJs, these different things soon started to overlap and feed into each other. In my paintings and drawings, a lot of the mark making has relations to movements or sounds. I reference graphic scores and music notations, but I like to keep those references quite ambiguous. There is a sense of rhythm in the paintings, some people see it and some don’t. Interestingly, a lot of people read a visual resemblance to weather into them. While I wasn’t necessarily intending the works to have a

relationship to weather or natural things, I am not unhappy with that association. In my practice as a DJ, I curate playlists which relate to different elements. If I’m placing music in relation to the natural elements, it makes sense that other people would relate the paintings to those different elements. Across my different practices, my work can touch similar things which are translated into different forms.

You mentioned being inspired by music and sounds when you paint. This might explain the relation between your paintings and your music curation as a DJ. Do you ever paint in silence?

Yes, sometimes I paint in silence. Most of the time I put mixes on, and I get into a bit of a trance. When I’m in a good painting flow, it can be really trance-like. Especially when I work on big canvases, and I am repeating these different movements and rhythms. It usually comes very naturally and without thinking about what the painting is going to look like. A lot of the time, I’ll paint close up enough to the canvas that it fills my vision. Occasionally, I’ll

take a stand back and see what’s working and what’s not.

Some of your artworks are made on rather big scales. I believe you have to stretch and move in certain ways to apply paint on such large canvases. Is this something you relate to your study of movements?

I think it’s interesting thinking about the different ways painting can be approached, in terms of how you apply the paint to the canvas. Whether it’s close up with a tiny brush, far away and stretching the arm out, or even on a table and you’re working from above. If your canvas is placed on the floor, you might be crouching down or sitting. These different ways in which your body is placed in relation to the canvas can create various marks.

In which way does your background in ballet influence your practice as a fine artist? How did the transition from dance to fine art come about? Was it natural for you to transfer your

skills from one art form to another?

When I was at ballet school, I always enjoyed art class. I am the type of person who needs to know exactly what direction they are taking in life. So, when I stopped ballet, I decided I would try and pursue arts. I did a foundation and then went to Slade School of Fine Art. It felt like quite a natural transition. After I left ballet school, I realized that as a ballet dancer, you are the material. The choreographer is the artist, and the dancer is the material. Now, I’m in a position where I’m an artist and I have autonomy about what I make rather than being part of someone else’s art. All of the knowledge I got from ballet school still exists through my work. It wasn’t like I closed one chapter and started something new. I still take the things I learned and put them into my paintings. During my studies at Slade, I worked on collaborative projects aiming to translate drawings into a piece of movement. That’s definitely something I want to



come back to at some point and create more dance related work.

Can you tell us about your DJing activity and the bridges you are aiming to build between music and fine art?

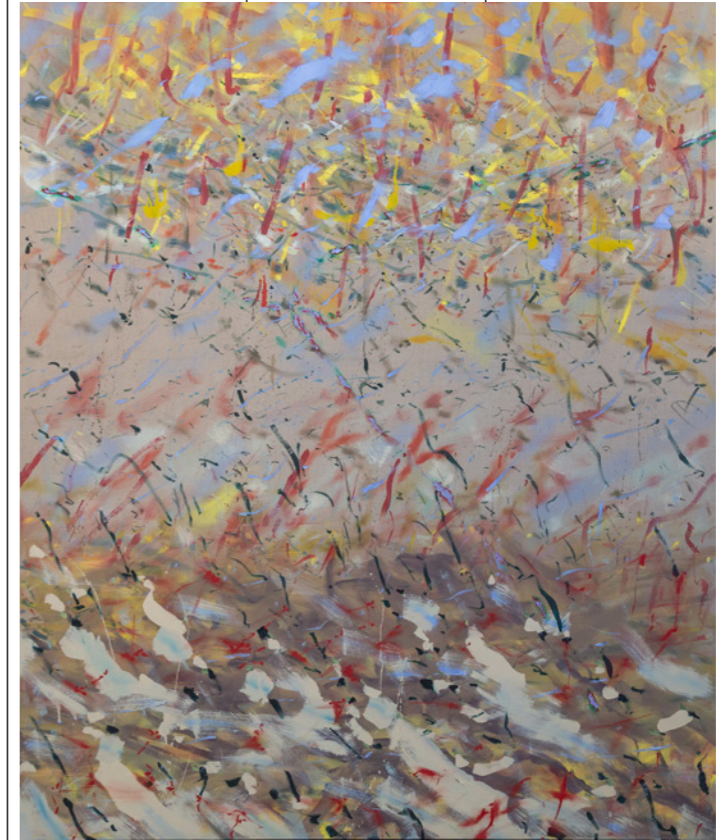
I’m in a lucky position where I’m part of the art world and the music world – and still slightly in the dance world. I try to maneuver these different spaces and take things from one into the others. I’ve become really aware of how a painting practice is such an insular thing. There is so much prestige around it, and a lot of money is involved. It can feel very transactional... On the flipside, I’m part of the clubbing and music scene, which is so collective and about creating an environment for people to come together and dance. There’s no hierarchy around it and everyone is enjoying the party together. The DJ is also nothing without the crowd. Going forward, I’m

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trying to think about how I can take those ideas of audience involvement and non-hierarchical relationships into an

guess the difference between this and DJing is the

Fantasy can be many things. In art, fantasy can be a genre, but it can also be about creating a utopian



art practice – more specifically, into a painting practice. I’ve been thinking about what it would mean to have a socially engaged painting practice, and if that’s possible.

A painting practice is more often than not socially engaging as you don’t paint for yourself. The final aim of a painting is to be exhibited and to be confronted by the gaze of viewers. I

immediacy of this sharing moment. How would you bring both together?

This is why I like showing video works in club spaces – because that brings something from the fine art world into a club space. A lot of the time when I’m making video works for clubs, I’m using my paintings or my drawings as source material. I’ll get a camera and slowly move through the painting with it, creating immersive shots which get projected into nightclubs.

concept relating to something more spiritual. Your work is open to interpretation, but I sense some depiction of a personal utopia. How does your fantasy take form through your work?

I like that you mentioned utopia because that’s something I’ve been thinking about. Going to raves does feel like a utopian fantasy from the

scenery and losing track of time. That is something that’s been inspiring me at the moment. Some of my paintings try to replicate the type of visions you might see or experience on a dance floor when everyone’s a bit loose and on drugs. Hence, why you might find this otherworldliness in my paintings. I try to load up the paintings with different information that can then allow the viewer to read the works how they want them to. I’m not necessarily defining what I want the viewer to see in the paintings. In that sense, there’s some fantasy in there.

I also relate to fantasy in terms of where I hope to see my work in the future. Obviously, there’s a part of fantasy in the content of the work, but fantasy also exists in thinking about how we can make the art world more inclusive and less hierarchical. I fantasize about making the art world operate in a more similar way to music and club settings. That said, of course I also acknowledge that there are things that are not right about the clubbing industry either. But I think you can take the positives from each and try to merge them into the other.