

Nick Naber visited by Francesca Cozzone

I'll never forget the day I met Nick Naber. It was my second semester after transferring from Marquette University to University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. It was after a terrible snowstorm and awfully cold out. On the first day of Figure Drawing, I showed up in three layers of clothes and two coats, one happened to be a floor length sweater. Nick was the only student in the classroom. As I looked around picking my drawing horse for the year (so important socially and academically), Nick called to me and said, "Sit here." So I walked over, put my things down, quickly taking off all my layers. We were instant friends. He is a constant source of inspiration and drive.

When he approached me with the idea of starting the Coastal Post, I could not turn him down.

Studio Visit done on 3/24/14

What inspired you to create The Coastal Post?

The impetus to create The Coastal Post is that there are so many people that are considered emerging artists, but the coverage of these people is so light. Other blogs or publications are focused on emerging artists or curators, yet their work isn't there. Contributors end up reviewing shows at the MET, MoMA, or at the Whitney. I wouldn't really say that level is considered emerging. I would say once you've hit institutions of this level, you've kind of made it, you know?

Here on The East Coast, there is a lot of work happening in small galleries on the Lower East Side, in Chelsea project spaces, or in Bushwick that is exciting — things that need to be talked and thought about. There is sometimes not a lot of conversation between emerging artists in New York, especially if they are from different graduate programs. It becomes really cliquish which is awful because in actuality we are all in the same boat. It is important for artists to talk to other artists and find out what they are doing in their studios or find out what projects they are working on. It is imperative for people on the East Coast to know what is going on in the West Coast and vice versa. That was my initial idea of why I wanted to start something like this.

What do you plan for its future?

I want to keep a tight monthly schedule of having two studio visits, one from the West Coast and one from the East Coast. I hope over time our contributors will be more comfortable with each other, and they will do studio visits with each other either via Skype or in person. In addition, our contributors are going to shows that they love or hate and should tell our readers about it. I want to create a forum for artists to express themselves. I would love to have people from New York or California seeing the reviews, and go "I should really go see what is happening in the Mission or what's happening in Bushwick."

What challenges have you faced post graduating from Pratt's graduate program?

One of the biggest things after graduate school is a lack of funding, which eventually leads to a lack of space. That is a difficult thing to deal with especially when you are coming from a graduate program where your studio can be pretty large. There you have a lot of space to store stuff and are able to work in any medium. I think that was one of the hardest things for me. Currently, I work in a studio in my home. I work in what would be my dining room. It is wonderful because I can work at any time but it is also kind of a hindrance because sometimes its like "Oh, I should really do the dishes."

The other thing that is really difficult when getting out of graduate school is you don't have same amount of critical voices. For the first year, its kind of amazing because you are really just free to do whatever you want. After that, say

a year or a year and half into it, you are like “I want somebody here. I want to talk to somebody. I just want somebody to look at this piece.” That’s something that’s not afforded to you when you are not in a program or in a studio building.



Has New York City been helpful or unhelpful in your artistic path?

I was lucky because I ended up meeting a lot of people from other programs because I worked for Sue Scott Gallery with Pat Steir on an installation. There were people from other schools working on that with us. This gave me a little bit of an edge in regards to knowing people outside of my program. So its nice for me. I go to openings, and I know one or two people because I have been active in that way.

I was fortunate that I was picked by a small project space/gallery in Chelsea while I was in school. So the pressure to find a space to show my work isn't really there. It is still very difficult getting group shows. You want to show, but it is very difficult to break in, break through, and just get that break to do something. As an artist, I think it is also difficult to do something because it is super expensive in New York. It is hard to justify buying ten sheets of paper when you have not done laundry in a month.

A lot of people think you need to be in New York or in LA to 'make it'. Do you agree with this?

This is bullshit. It really depends on what you want out of your career, what you want it to be like. I have a friend that is from Boston and was living in New York for grad school. He had hard time deciding whether or not he should move back to Boston, and I told him what I just said. Outside of New York or LA/SF you can be a big fish in a small pond, and eventually, if you want to show in New York, you can do that after you prove yourself where you are located. If that is your ultimate goal, it is possible to show in New York or LA/SF without living there. People's goals are different.

How would you describe your work and practice?

I would describe my work as grounded in architecture. I have a deep interest in the places we inhabit and the places we use to live. My work tends to lean toward the abstract. It starts with a real place, but over time, it is combined or colored in a way that isn't naturalistic. The work tends to be both methodical and precise, which comes from my control freak attitude.

As for my practice, I work a lot on the weekends. I work better in the mornings, so I try to do a lot of the detailed work then, and in the afternoons, work on things that are less strenuous like mixing color and applying paint. I have been trying to work for two hours a night after work. Typically, this doesn't happen though. (Laughter.)

I want you to explain your use of watercolors. Watercolors, as a medium, are really interesting for your work since your work is about architecture and about being repetitive and severe. Watercolors are so uncontrolled. I enjoy seeing how you use the medium because you can see still see the lines in your drawings, but the watercolor is that fluidity between the buildings. How is watercolor influencing your practice?

For me, watercolor is a new medium. I used to use watercolor a lot more when I was a little bit younger. When I first moved into my apartment/studio it drove me crazy to not be able to paint in acrylic or oil. Watercolor became the best medium for me.

What I like about using the watercolor is the freedom. At first, it was infuriating that I would have this hard line and the watercolor would bleed past the edge. I started to do multiple watercolors. The more I tried to control it, the more uncontrollable it became. This is when it becomes more interesting as a medium because it has this close reading where you can see the details, and it has this distant reading where it has this pristine surface which really doesn't exist.

I also enjoy that the colors I mix, depending on the order of how I lay them down, different colors can sometimes pop back up. For example, I was doing watercolors yesterday. I mixed a gray, but it ended up being a more purple gray. It was a dark gray when I mixed it, but there really is no real way of controlling the color. I don't typically do color swatches to see what I am getting because I like the surprise.

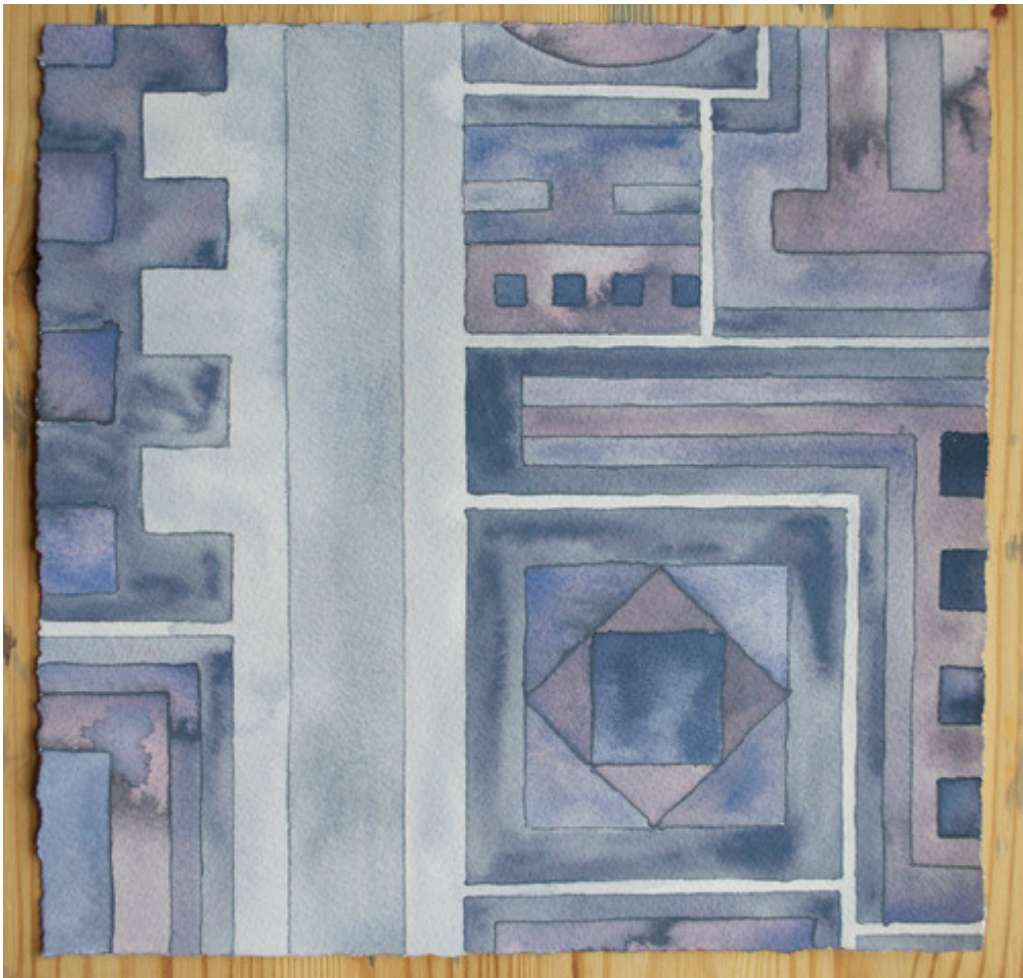
Watercolor also brings up the use of color. These new pieces are your only project that has bright colors in them. What is that like for you?

I'm that person who always gets pegged as an artist that hates color and never wants to use it — the guy who just absolutely hates it. But I love color and enjoy using it. A lot of the work, I was doing I really felt like a dark palette or a palette of monochromes was the way that I wanted to convey my message.

I think with the watercolors, I feel a lot freer to use color because they are not as precious to me as maybe the acrylic paintings were or the more meticulous line work I do in the drawings. It is also a way for me to play with color. Even though those older paintings were monochromatic, there was a ton of color mixed into the greys. But I think that the bright colors are great. It does something different. It brings a more naturalistic reading. Not naturalistic, I know they are abstract, but I think the color choices are more on par with what you might see in the natural world.

Is there anything exciting you are working on right now, you would like to share with the viewers?

I just started a whole new series of watercolors yesterday. I think of them as these aerial views of these cities.



Cityscape 4, 2014, watercolor and gouache on watercolor paper, 8 x 8 inches



Cityscape 2, 2014, watercolor and gouache on watercolor paper, 8 x 8 inches



They are not floor plans, but I think how they are kind of like satellite plans .

Yes, it another way of viewing. They are compelling as abstractions as I'm imagine what a building would look like from an aerial perspective. They are kind of killing me a little bit. The way they are painted is tight, and it's hard to get a straight line with watercolor. The colors I'm using are rich, and the work is starting to look nice

What are the new watercolors doing for you?

They are definitely coming out from the earlier watercolors I was doing (*Structures*). When I make one of the drawings they are never planned. They just happen. That is what I like about the way I work. It is also like "Oh, I saw this building today, I saw another building, and the other day in New Jersey, I saw that one building. It would be really weird if these three things got combined in some way." That is the way I think about my pieces. That's the way I use my sketchbook, I draw my surroundings. Whether it is people, houses, buildings, skyscrapers, or some detail. I'm always looking at all these little things. How can these things be combined, and I combine them.

With these aerial views. I have been spending a lot of time on Google Earth in the satellite view. I find it intriguing that you can look at people's homes and their private property from a satellite, and what information is given away from these satellites. It is bizarre for me because I have been reading about the NSA scandal, and it is just you are never really alone. There is no privacy. I'm also disgusted with the idea that there is this voyeuristic vision through satellites.

What outside of art and architecture inspires your work and making?

A book I look to a lot is *Other Voices, Other Rooms* by Truman Capote. I'm in love with the way this story is built around this dilapidated home. All these things happen within the vicinity of this house. I'm drawn to these books that have lives being lived in a specific space, and how that space is described. Right now I'm reading the *Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. It is incredibly lush in the way that New York City is described.

Is there an album or an artist you have to listen to in your studio?

I listen to a lot of sad songs. I listen to lots of Rufus Wainwright, Justin Vivian Bond, Gentleman Reg, and early Elton John. Specifically, *The Tumbleweed Connection* and *Captain Fantastic and Brown Dirty Cowboy*. These albums work as a long narrative instead of individual songs. The albums have a sadness or wanting in them that is alluring to me.

If you could describe your work or your studio practice in three words, what would they be?

Regimented, driven, careful.

If you could date any artist, dead or alive, who would be?

I would NEVER EVER date an artist. I have way too much crazy in my life, to date another artist.

nicknaber.com

Studio Views:







