

NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021 nightgallery.ca

Artland Editors, "Inside Robert Nava's Childlike Art of Absurdity", *Artland*, November 2018.

ARTLAND

Inside Robert Nava's Childlike Art of Absurdity



Installation view, Robert Nava, 7 June - 14 July, 2018, at Gallery Sorry We're Closed

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New York-based artist Robert Nava earned his MFA at Yale University in 2011. When asked when he started painting, he replies that he started at the age of 3. His own projects, though, started developing in 2007. Nava is interested in the absurdity of everyday life, and extreme situations. He portrays these moments in often playful paintings, aesthetically drawn to humorous abstract and gestural paintings. 'They're kind of these dumb paintings, and many times people think a kid could have done it,' Nava muses in an **Art Handler** interview.

He is not the only artist of his day who seeks to portray the ugly beauty and senseless violence of everyday life. One could find similarities, for example, between what inspires Nava and what inspires Canadian-British artist **Oli Epp** in their artistic process – albeit with very different executions and styles. Nava says he takes inspiration from snippets of conversation he picks up on the street, or random things that happen to him. A collection of little things that have value and are often overlooked. 'I like the little things, the pieces of life... from there bigger ideas happen,' he tells **Das Haus**.

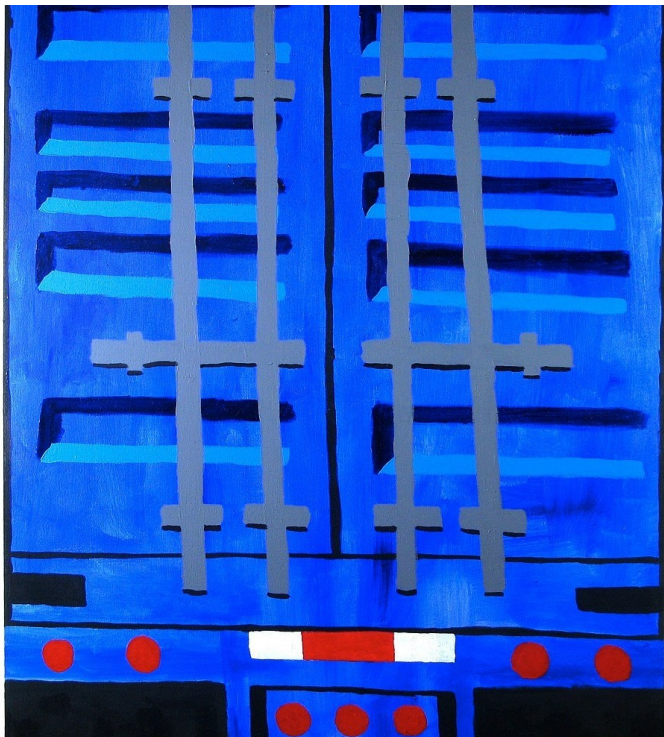
Coming back to that notion that a kid could have done his art, Nava says some of his favourite art is children's art. Looking at his truck series in which he paints the backs of trucks, this influence reveals itself strongly. The paintings are colourful, geometrical and simple, yet profoundly mesmerising as they jump out at you – almost like the best artwork in your favourite children's book, but larger-than-life. The truck paintings are inspired by his side-job as a mover in NYC. He spends several days a week driving trucks around and staring at New York traffic and at the backs of these trucks as he moves people's stuff. He explains how New York traffic hit him one day as a 'slow moving gallery' with all those rectangles. And the trucks? 'It's a truck you see everywhere, and the fact that paintings could be dedicated to the backs of trucks I think is, in itself, a great idea,' says Nava.

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Robert Nava. Photo courtesy of the artist and Sorry We're Closed



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Nava is a thinker – when asked what his painting super power would be, he answers: a smaller brain, so he won't over think when he's painting. One thing he thinks a lot about and is interested in with regards to his work is the concept of nonsense. He believes people should give more consideration to this. Purposeful nonsense might mean that you are simply way ahead of your time – perhaps hundreds of years from now someone will make some kind of perfect sense out of it. '[R]andomness and absurdity can be the seeds to new things,' he explains.



For his 2016 solo exhibition 'I'm Rubber, You're Glue' at Three Four Three Four gallery in Brooklyn, NY, Nava quotes from Carl Jung's *Man and his Symbols*. He is clearly fascinated with Jung's ideas regarding the battle between hero and monster, mirroring the battle between the ego and its shadow side, its regressive trends. The exhibition text reads: 'The hero, on the contrary, must realize that the shadow exists and that he can draw strength from it. He must come to terms with its destructive powers if he is to become sufficiently terrible to overcome the dragon.'

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Nava's latest feat was a solo exhibition at Brussels's **Sorry We're Closed** gallery (07 June – 14 July 2018). An exhibition space dedicated solely to Nava's work, "all dwelling under the visceral umbrella of childish fantasy," in the words of curator **Caio Twombly**.

Nonsense, childish fantasy and the banalities and shadows of everyday life – Nava guides us straight into their depths, only to reveal how they might, someday in the future, be deciphered.