



Soon I Will Be President

November 3rd to December 17th, 2016
The McIninch Art Gallery





I Need Some More
oil on paper, 22" x 30", 2015
courtesy of the artist, photo credit James Hull

Landscape, Abstraction, Stencil, Text.

by PETER R. KALB

Realists collect things. They assemble the pieces of the world, making walls from rocks, homes from bricks, declarations from words, and museums from objects and images. Idealists, on the other hand, traffic in symbols, allegories and metaphors. Joe Wardwell is a realist. The landscape paintings of the American West and the Hudson River that inspired “Soon I will be President” at the McNinch Art Gallery are idealist visions of far more than the wilderness. Waterfalls symbolize national power; train tracks, progress; sunsets, impending war; parting clouds, God’s grace. This isn’t reality, rather it’s dreams and politics. Sketches made in the woods of tree stumps and boulders—those are real. Those are rocks like the ones broken by Gustave Courbet’s laborers or used to pave the streets in Robert Henri’s New York. Realists collect rocks.



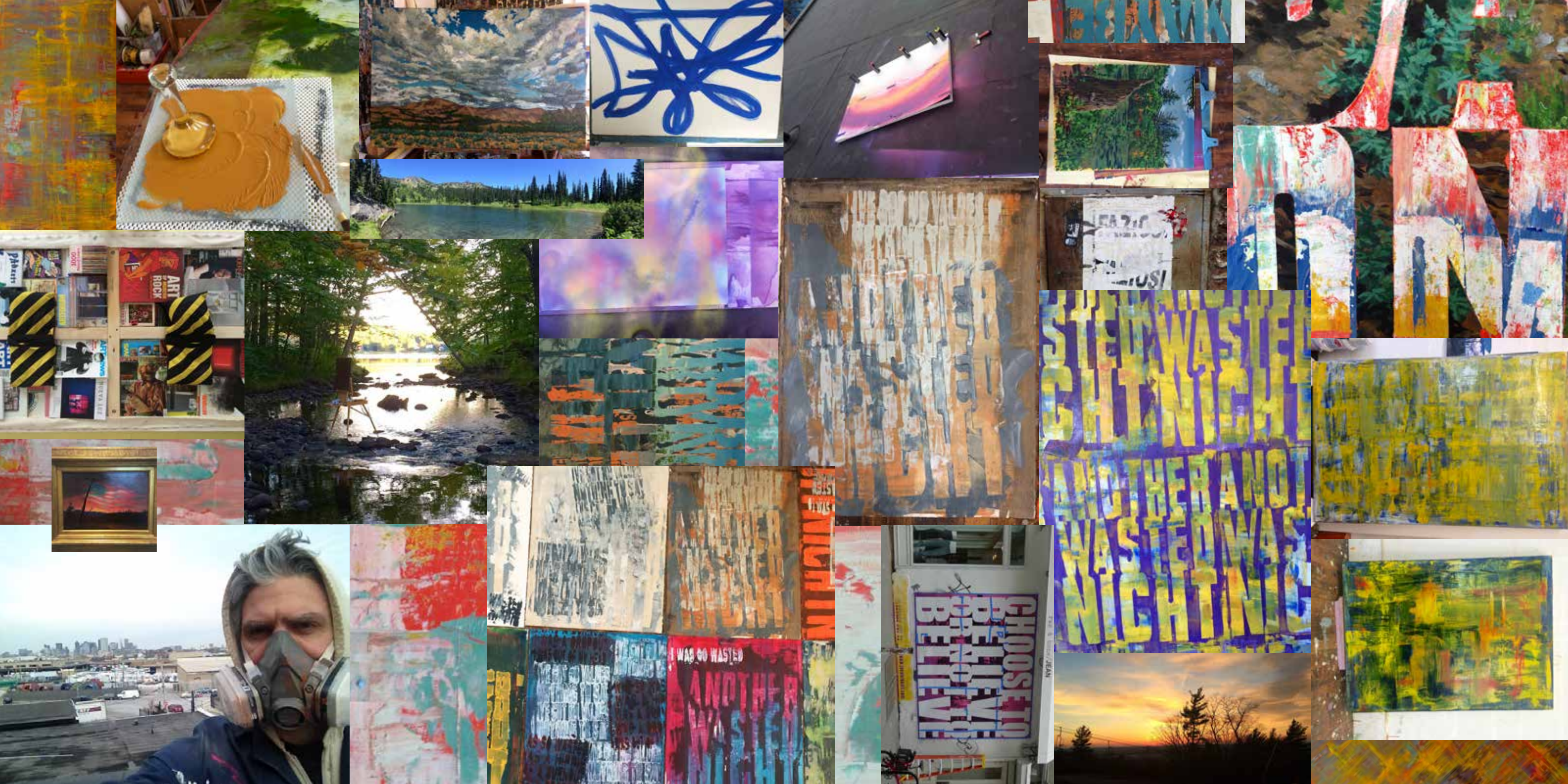


No More
oil and spray paint paper, dimensions variable, 2015
courtesy of the artist, photo credit Adam Henry and John Carrico

Joe Wardwell spent the better part of his career as a realist, collecting souvenirs from the two-century debate U.S. culture has been having with itself over nature. Instead of adding another story, allegory, myth, or metaphor to make us grasp the stakes of global warming, Wardwell has carefully entangled facts into his work. The landscapes layered into his compositions are mined from the image bank of the collective American imagination, already burdened with meaning. In Wardwell's canvases, the abstractions, which once might have been seen as the pure expression of a painter's soul, are references and signs ripped from the great adventure of "non-objective art." The texts are also not original, being appropriated from poems, songs, and speeches and rendered through the

impersonal means of the stencil, an analog companion to the modes of technical reproduction that has been with us for centuries. Every part of these works are stones, chosen for their own weight, shape and meaning. The ideological use of American landscape painting and Abstract Expressionism butts up against the shouts of punk rock musicians, lyric poets and politicians.

The metaphorical dream that once connected the rush of Niagara Falls with the power of the nation claiming to own it, or that so convincingly bound the atomized propulsion of spattered paint with post-atomic reality, is not summoned here. What each of Wardwell's objects, pictures, marks, and words all share, is their presence, though often at great distance, in the discourse of





Don't ask what For
oil and spray paint on paper
22" x 30", 2015
courtesy of the artist, photo credit James Hull

nature and nation in the 20th and 21st centuries. In the campaign seasons of the new millennium, the political stage has revealed itself to be less a battlefield of ideas and competing truth claims, and more a threatening playground for statements of all kinds. On one hand we have heard impassioned pleas for justice, pledges of community, commitments to public good, and

intellectual proposals made at considerable risk. On the other hand, today's politics have been littered with lies, slander, defensive exaggerations, retrograde stereotypes, and outlandish caricature. Wardwell's art has mined all of this and his canvases become a place—half laboratory and half Ouija board—shaped by the forms and language of contemporary politics, and offering viewers a chance



Don't ask what For
oil and spray paint on paper
22" x 30", 2015
courtesy of the artist, photo credit James Hull

to slow down and think before turning back to the television screens, newspapers, and voting booths.

Over the past decade, Wardwell has methodically built a syntax out of different objects and artifacts that have been speaking for centuries. Painters in the first century of US history rendered vast stretches of territory

inhabitable, while writers argued that the same land was threatened. Abstract artists convinced us to care, and sign painters, paid by the advertising executives and campaign managers, tried to bend it all to the will of business, nation and ego. Pictures of nature hardly seem enough anymore: Does one try to paint the 1179 miles of the Keystone XL Pipeline or the 200,000,000

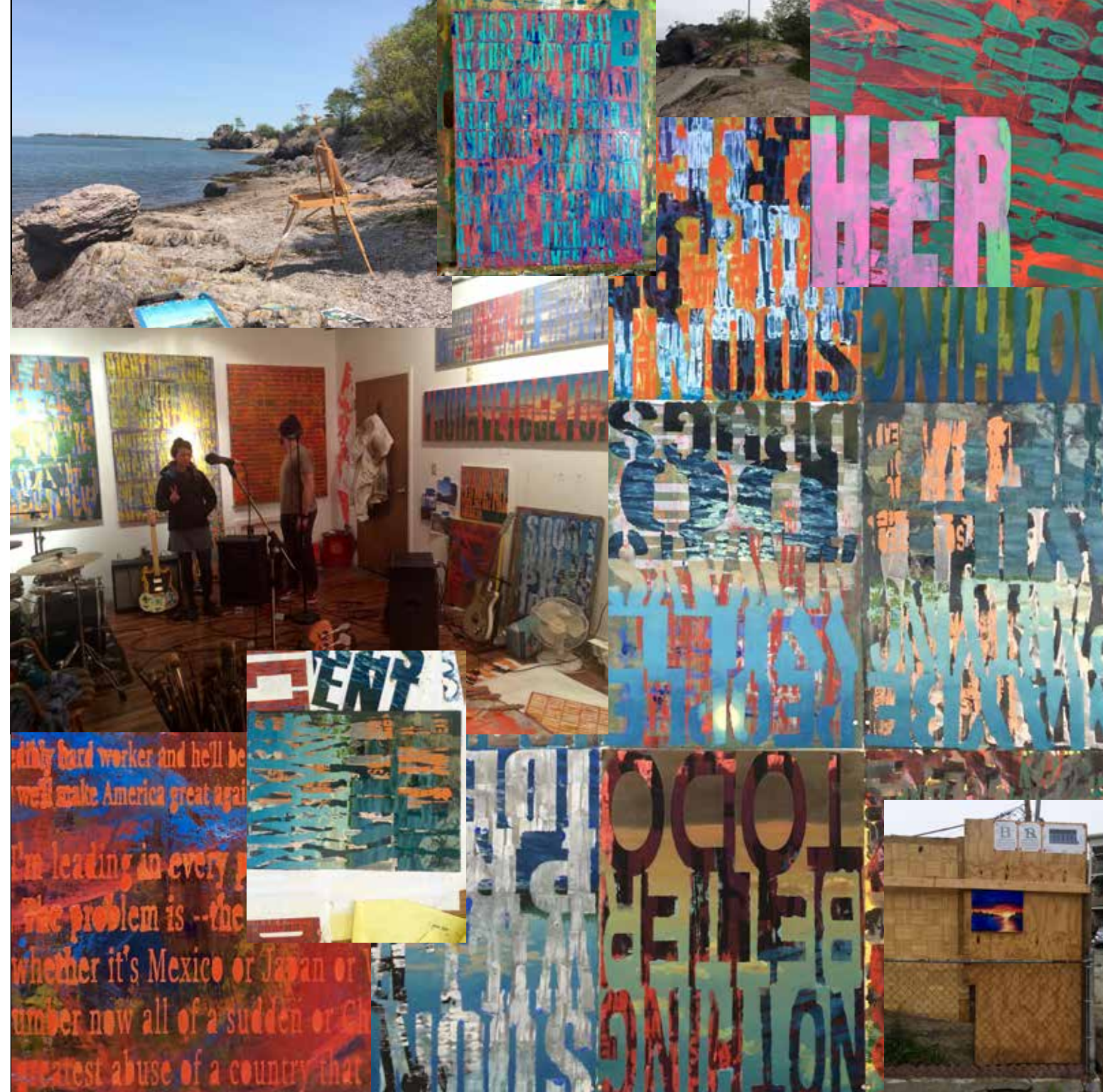


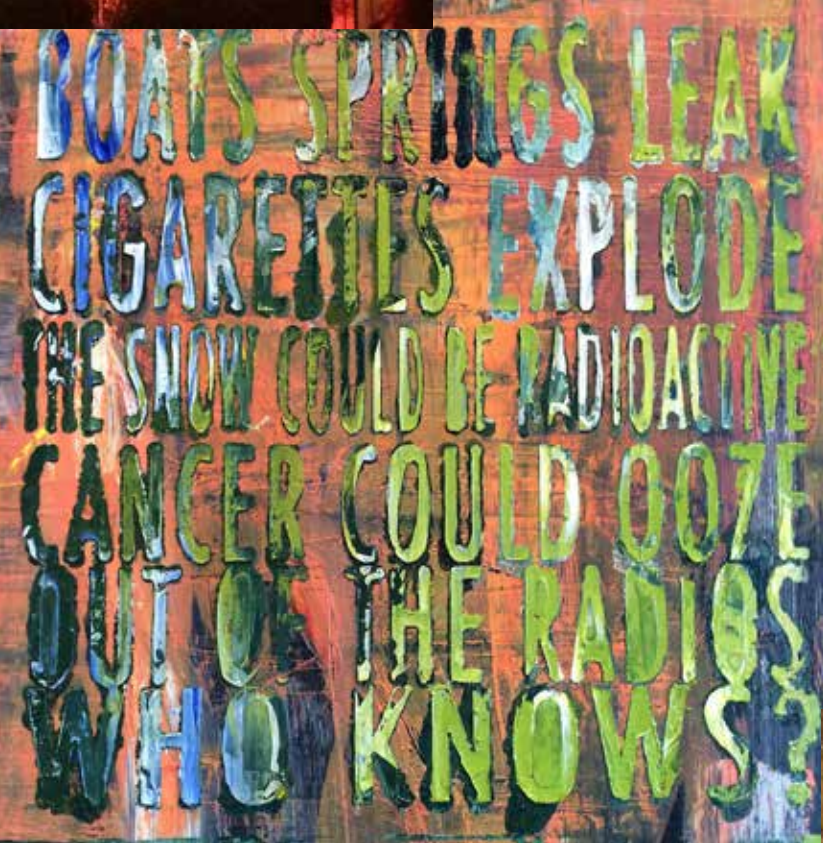
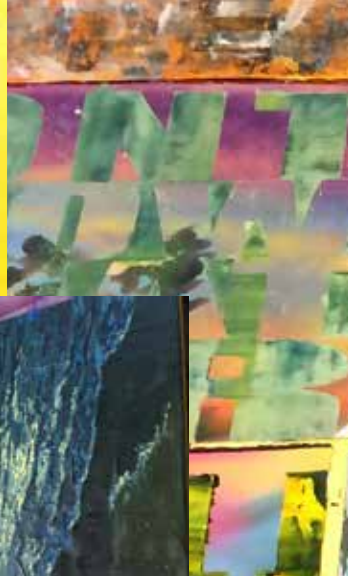
gallons of oil spilled by BP Deepwater Horizon? Wardwell's compressions—oil on canvas in the gallery, but aided in the studio with Photoshop and jpegs—let us live with the noise of all the communication: political, romantic, angry, elegiac, aesthetic – that gives meaning to the environment. In another age, a realist might have drawn the stones or even piled the rocks. Today, our reality—especially that part of reality that continues to be discussed as nature, environment, and ecology—is constituted more by images, declarations, and sentiment than by flora, fauna, geology and weather. And so we turn not to the stones, roots and rivers, but instead to the landscapes, abstractions, texts, and stencils to shape the meaning of nature in the 21st century.

Always Wear the Happy Face
oil on paper, 30" x 22", 2016

People Will Always Do Drugs
oil on paper, 30" x 22", 2016

courtesy of the artist, photo credit James Hull







Soon I will be President
oil on paper, 30" x 22", 2016

courtesy of the artist

PETER R. KALB BIO

Peter R. Kalb is the Cynthia L. and Theodore S. Berenson Associate Professor of Contemporary Art at Brandeis University. His latest book, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary* (2014), is a global study of political, theoretical, and aesthetic currents in today's art world. Kalb is the Boston-based corresponding editor for *Art in America* and recent essays appear in Elizabeth A. Pergam ed., *Drawing in the 21st Century: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Practice* (2015) and Rebecca McGrew ed. *Andrea Bowers* (2014).

JOE WARDWELL BIO

Joe Wardwell lives and works in Jamaica Plain, MA, where he is currently an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at Brandeis University (Waltham, MA). He received a Bachelor of Arts in Art History and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting in 1996 from the University of Washington (Seattle, WA), and a Master of Fine Arts in Painting from Boston University (Boston, MA) in 1999. He has exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum (Lincoln, MA) and has work in each collection. In 2012, Wardwell was a recipient of the Massachusetts Cultural Council Grant. In addition to numerous group exhibitions, he has had solo exhibitions in New York, New Haven, Boston, and Seattle. His work is represented by LaMontagne Gallery (Boston, MA) and Fred Giampietro Gallery (New Haven).

THANK YOU

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The McNinch Art Gallery

MISSION STATEMENT

The McNinch Art Gallery, administered by the School of Arts and Sciences at Southern New Hampshire University, provides first-hand experiences in the arts through collections, exhibitions, and diverse programs designed to support the university curriculum and enhance public engagement with fine art.

This publication is in conjunction with the exhibition Joe Wardwell, *Soon I Will Be President* on view from November 3 – December 17, McNinch Art Gallery, Southern New Hampshire University.

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The McIninch Art Gallery

Gallery Hours | Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. • Thursdays, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. • Closed Sundays and university holidays

Location | 2500 North River Road, Robert Frost Hall • Manchester NH • 603-629-4622 • www.snhu.edu/art