

Wayson R. Jones

Artist Statement

As someone who grew up on 50s and 60s TV and movies, the stark contrast and tension between deep black and blinding white—and the myriad gradations between—are a lasting source of inspiration in my work. I make predominantly black and white paintings on paper, canvas, or wood panel that embody abstraction as both a process and an end. The works contain a feeling of weighty, massive presence, achieved through contrast, texture, and scale.

My compositional approach is reductive: the image area is often divided by a horizontal line, which can vary from broken to hard-edge. In the two resulting spaces, the upper zone is usually occupied by a massive shape that can be anchored to the line or float above it. This roughly symmetrical format is present across my various bodies of work. The restriction of compositional choices allows for spontaneity and improvisation: with the exception of the rough sketches that begin much of the portrait-based pieces, there is no initial plan or outline. Working exclusively on a horizontal surface also influences the painting procedure and much of the character of the work.

The first medium I fell in love with was pastel: the lush color, and the intimacy of holding the pigment in your hand, without the mediation of a brush. I've allowed that feeling of joy in the material to guide my work since. I use acrylic for its quick drying, glossiness, and ability to blend with other wet and dry media. I often use acrylic texture gels, pumice gel in particular. I'm intrigued by its physicality: ground volcanic rock suspended in a thick medium. Its thick, coarse quality produces a perception of massiveness and density, even in small works. The use of powdered graphite and gloss medium is a mainstay of my recent work. They are mixed directly on the image surface—most often paper—sometimes combined with feathers, sand, or cut dreadlocks.

I experience my work as the creation of artifacts that embody elemental themes: earth, sky, planets, childhood, bodies, decay. I proceed from a belief that political thought is implicit in a sense, and therefore can be present in abstract work. Considering an image of water can lead quite naturally to thinking about crucial environmental and human rights issues. Titling the works is important to suggesting such connections.

Letting the material lead the process allows me to work from my deeper self, without premeditation. Once, as a sleepless six-year-old, I wandered out of my grandmother's country home, looked up, and saw the Milky Way filling the night sky. Not understanding what it was, my jaw dropped in amazement. That awe-struck feeling has never left me. A suggestion of those qualities of ancient vastness and wonder is what I want my work to express.