It's Nice That

Greg Ito's meticulous portfolio of paintings explores "time, love, loss, hope, and tragedy"
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Greg Ito: The Garden. Acrylic on canvas. 48" x 48". 2019.

Greg Ito, an artist based in Los Angeles (where he was born and raised), has a fascinating portfolio. It's one of consistency and overarching concepts, with colour, applied meticulously via a code of his own creation "My work revolves around a few central themes," he tells It's Nice That. "Time, love, loss, hope, and tragedy to name a few." These themes materialise as paintings in a flat, graphic style, often portrayed via comic book-style panels on canvas where pinks, purples and blues dominate his visual language.

For Greg, a career in art was almost unavoidable. "Family is very important to me, and a lot of my artistic inspirations at a young age came from my relatives," he recalls. From his mother playing the piano, to his grandfather creating cartoons, to his uncles who work in special effects and architecture, the creative industries is all he's ever known. As a result, "I always found myself gravitating toward art classes growing up," he explains. "I loved making things. The freedom I had to create whatever I wanted.

Today, having graduated from SFAI in San Francisco with a BFA in 2008 – a place which taught him to “dissolve the barriers between artistic mediums and think about everything as a whole practice” – Greg works largely in the medium of paint, while sculptures underpin this practice. “I never felt content with making only paintings, so sculpture became an inherent part of my practice,” Greg adds on this point. “I enjoy the dialogues that occur between objects and images, how they speak to one another and inform each other in a room.”

The imagery Greg chooses to depict is rigorously considered. He explains of his process: “In the vignette paintings, I figure out how many windows I want to put on the surface and draft it out in pencil on the primed canvas. Once the composition has been laid out I dig through my archive of images and begin piecing together a story. My images are catalogued into hundreds of folders, so I have folders named: snakes, cabin, boat, flowers, fire, waves, etc. I also have a collection of illustrated hands I’ve worked on, and some from other sources that I use in the paintings. Once my imagery components have been finalised I draft it out in the vignettes and get ready to paint.”

When it comes to the actual painting, this process is no-less pragmatic. Greg sees his works as an application of the world he sees and interacts with, and so his chosen medium is house paint. “It’s not a fancy art material, but a domestic material used to cover the world we live in. It seems very real in that way and it makes me feel comfortable when using it,” he remarks. His choices of colour reflect a major theme of his work: time. Day, twilight and nighttime are here represented in a colour palette which is almost scientifically consistent across his portfolio. “I use house paints that are mixed in big batches and employ the colours like a code, which can be seen in all my works,” Greg says.

Ultimately, Greg’s works present a dichotomy between the surreal imagery he depicts and the precision through which they are depicted. There’s a melancholy to his paintings and sculptures, balanced by his choice of colours, the romantic images that make up his compositions, and the graphic language that grounds each of his paintings.

Greg Ito: Snakes In the Garden. Acrylic on canvas. 74” x 48”. 2018.