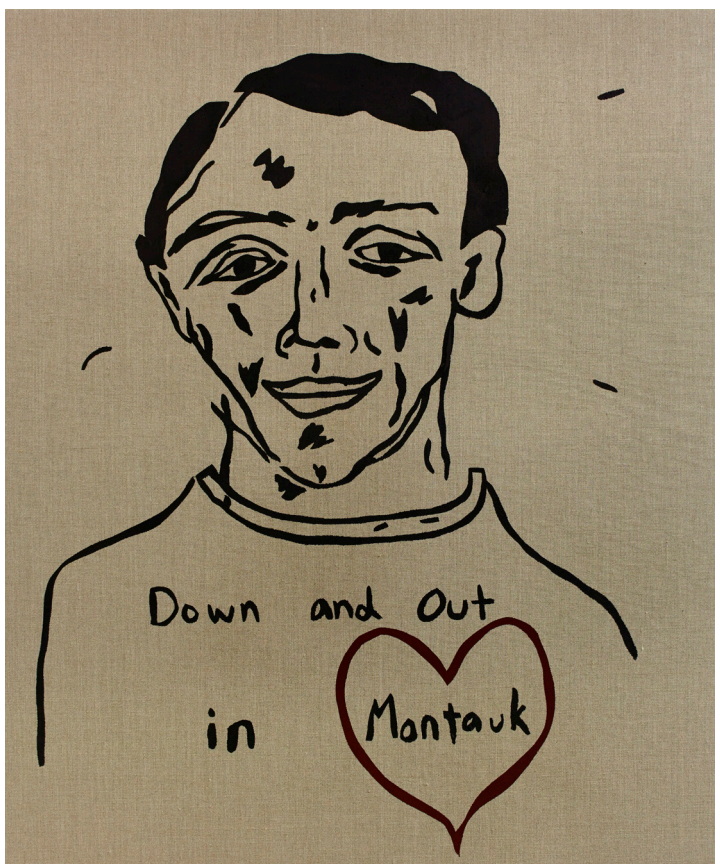


THE KNOCKTURNAL

Exclusive: An Interview With Artist Joel Mesler

by Charlotte Kohlberg | May 3, 2019



On a rainy but cozy Sunday morning, Joel Mesler sat down with me for a quick chat at The Mark Hotel, where Mesler has been doing portraits of hotel guests for the past two days. Just in time for the four-day art festival Frieze New York, on Randall's Island, New York.

A former Manhattan gallerist, Mesler is now based in East Hampton with his own gallery. Before embarking in painting and artistry himself, Mesler has an impressive Resume of representing artists, such as Henry Taylor and Rashid Jones, in their early careers before becoming stars themselves. Growing up in Beverly Hills, Mesler explores his past traumas with humorous allegories and backgrounds evoking the lush interior of The Polo Bar.

In this interview, the artist discusses his inspiration behind his art and his gallery and his view on the fickle nature of the art market and what makes an artist last.

The Knockturnal: You yourself started out as an art dealer and represented artists, what has that shift been like from dealer to artist?

Joel Mesler: Um, trying to convince people that don't want to be convinced that this is okay, and it's okay for them, and it's okay for me to do it.

The Knockturnal: What made you want to shift careers from art dealer to an artist?

Joel Mesler: Pretty much not having nervous breakdowns constantly. You know I had represented artists for about 15 years and although it's very rewarding in certain aspects, the emerging art market is changing. So, I didn't want to...the city kind of breeds psychology that there isn't enough to go around, and people kind of buy into that, but it's actually not true. I kind of went for a step back and realized all the art world and market has to offer and not having to be in that competitive, trying to get my piece of the pie, environment.

The Knockturnal: What are some of your favorite artists that you have represented?



Joel Mesler: Ooooh, well, I'm proud to have represented Henry Taylor, who is having a giant moment now. He's going to be in the Venice Bi-annual. His paintings are selling for a million dollars now when we used to be selling them for \$1,200. But I have worked with such amazing artists, like Mathew Chambers, David Dalmo, etc. Yeah, over the years, working with so many artists have been so rewarding.

The Knockturnal: When you are looking for artists to represent what specifically do you look for in their artwork or what do you think makes a great artist?

Joel Mesler: It's definitely an intuitive feel, I think. Once you've seen somebody that has what it takes, I guess, they can't do anything else, and in order to be successful out there, you have to keep doing it. I mean it's a mix of so many things. I'm working with a young artist now, we are actually doing a show in the city this week, and from the start, I knew he was going to be successful. It's just the desire, he has the keen ability to make work and I can tell he's going to be incredibly successful throughout his career. You can tell, it's sort of one of those things whether: a) if someone has something to but also the if the project is a lasting project. If it's a one-liner then you know it's going to last maybe a year or two years, but when somebody has a practice that is a long term practice that literally it has taken his entire life to figure this practice out, you know if there is longevity there then there is going to be success at some point.

The Knockturnal: With your artwork is there a piece of your work or exhibition that was your favorite or that you are particularly proud of or is your favorite?

Joel Mesler: Um, I think I am not proud of any of my work. My art is all about essentially one day in my life. So, I think the work is if anything me trying to understand or an examination of that moment in time, but there is certainly nothing about it that I'm proud of.

The Knockturnal: How did you get the idea for Rental Gallery in East Hampton?

Joel Mesler: Just trying to stay alive. I was floundering in the city and it was rough going and it was just not something I wanted to do. And with three kids, it's not the greatest place to try and have a family, so we moved up there. And because I am a terrible plumber, I opened a gallery.



The Knockturnal: And it is a huge success!

Joel Mesler: It's all relative, but yeah, it is survival.

The Knockturnal: How did you start this quick style of portraiture?

Joel Mesler: Well, I did it literally just to kind of keep busy one year at an art fair. I think it is one of the dumbest things you can possibly do right now in the art world, so I have been really enjoying it. And you know, it's fun to be able to interact with people in a different way than you would just be sitting privately in your studio or at an exhibition and your selling to the 1% of the 1%. It's much more interesting to converse with people that maybe aren't part of the art world and do paintings for \$250 and spread joy and happiness in the world.

The Knockturnal: Yeah, we need more of that! What inspires your work?

Joel Mesler: Literally this period in my life when I was 11 years old, and so all of my work I inspired from this one particular event an moment in my life that I'm not sure if I'm trying to understand, but I'm trying to make it so I don't resent that moment in my life. It's like I have something to say because I have very little to say otherwise, I figured this one moment in my life, I might as well stick to what I know, as they say.

The Knockturnal: What are some of the biggest challenges that you have faced in your career?

Joel Mesler: Trying to have a career is probably the biggest challenge. Yeah, trying to have a career and trying to be honest and genuine with it. Not be an asshole, do good things, reach other people, that's it.

The Knockturnal: Awesome, thank you so much!

Joel Mesler: Yeah! No Problem!

Although it took less than ten minutes, sitting for my first portrait was exciting and also a little unnerving. Watching him quickly flit from palette to canvas, he discussed while most people enjoy their portraits, others, to his satisfaction, are displeased with his renderings. He handed me my new portrait and I proudly left The Mark Hotel, another happy customer.