

The New York Times



The artist Chase Hall. He will have a solo show at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles from Nov. 8 through Dec. 14. Arden Wray for The New York Times

Chase Hall Wrestles With 'Hybridity'

The artist, who is frank about the issues raised by his mixed race, has a solo show opening in Los Angeles.

By Robin Pogrebin

Reporting from West Park, N.Y.

Oct. 22, 2024

It isn't hard to get Chase Hall talking. Having grown up with a mother in and out of rehab and a father in and out of jail; attended eight schools before the age of 16; and achieved an enviable degree of fame for an untrained 31-year-old artist, Hall has a lot to say.

He is generally expressing himself through his paintings, several of which will be on view in his solo show at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles, which opens Nov. 8 and runs through Dec. 14.

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But in a recent lengthy conversation at his studio in upstate New York, Hall also posed some of the complex questions that clearly — and consistently — consume him.

"How do things that define you, but don't end you, actually make you better instead of paralyze you?"

"What does rap music teach you? What do Blaxploitation films teach you? What do you see when you live in low income? And then what do you see when you're in high income?"

"Who's talking about what it's like to be Black and white at the same time?"



Hall working on "The Future and The Past (God is Us)" in September. Many of the paintings in his studio depict surfers, equestrians and football players rendered in bold lines and vibrant color. Arden Wray for The New York Times

Given all that Hall has gone through as an often-maligned mixed-race child from a tumultuous home, it's a wonder that his work lacks bitterness, anger or pain.

Instead, the paintings that surrounded him in his expansive studio depict surfers, equestrians and football players rendered in bold lines and vibrant color.

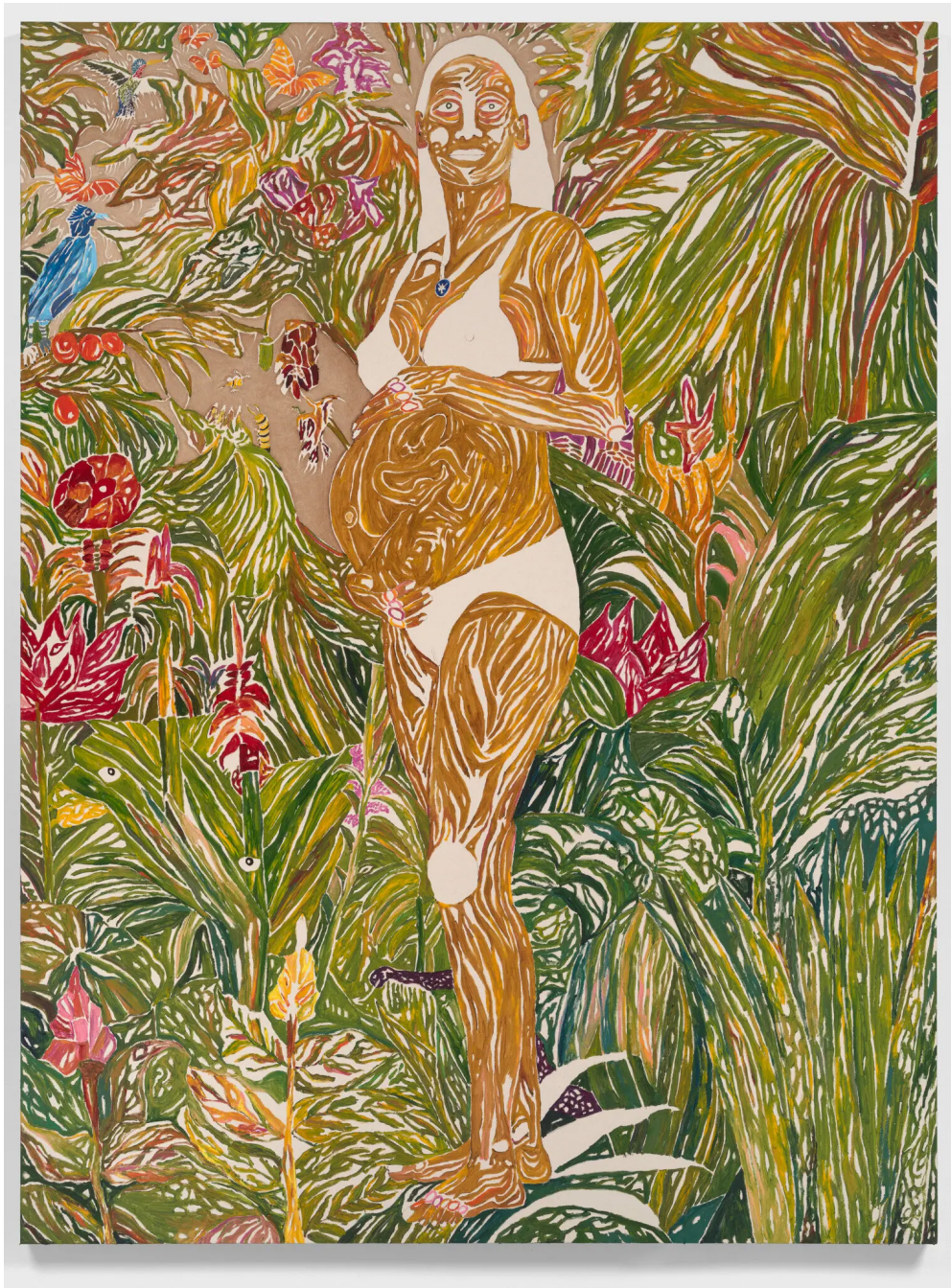
"It's poetic, and it's uplifting, and it's aspirational in the sense of opportunity and humanity," Kordansky said, adding that the white spaces in Hall's paintings create "a kind of ghost imagery."

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Hall's current positive outlook is clearly in part because of his personal life; he married Lauren Rodriguez, founder of the fashion label Lorod, in 2022, and they recently had a daughter, Henrietta.

His career is on the rise, with his work already in the collections of major institutions like the Whitney, the Walker Art Center and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 2022, he was commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera to produce a large-scale artwork for the opera house — a diptych depicting two scenes from the ancient Greek tragedy of *Medea* — that was recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Last year, he had his first solo museum show at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah.



His "Mother and Child (Lauren and Henrietta)," from this year. David Kordansky Gallery. Photo by Christopher Stach



"Sun Farrier," 2024 David Kordansky Gallery. Photo by Christopher Stach



"End of The Half," 2024 David Kordansky Gallery. Photo by Christopher Stach

"Hall's works are deeply autobiographical with personal hieroglyphics scattered throughout his vignettes," said *Cultured* magazine, "and yet his paintings remain remarkably timeless."

His mind is clearly prodigious, with conversation ranging from art to history to current events. One moment he is referencing the artists Mike Kelly, Robert Rauschenberg and Charles White, the next Stevie Wonder, the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan. He talks about Helen Frankenthaler, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner. Then he pivots to James Baldwin, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. And then to Trayvon Martin, Philando Castile and George Floyd.

Hall has also become something of a fashion darling, featured in *Forbes's* "30 Under 30" 2021 art and style list and having his wedding covered by *Vogue* in 2022.



"Over All Else (Fireflies)," 2024 David Kordansky Gallery. Photo by Dario Lasagni

And the people he paints — whether a jazz musician or a Tuskegee Airman — have their own dashing quality and dignity as well as a quiet complexity.

"There is this theme of leisure that runs throughout his practice," said the curator and gallerist Antwaun Sargent, who worked on a 2019 show that featured Hall and the artist Cameron Welch. "But also the underbelly of that." The artist — tall with a lanky elegance — clearly has not only an upbeat nature but an innate survivor instinct. And he says he has increasingly made peace with his past and with his parents.

"My mom is three years sober, and my dad is rehabilitating himself," Hall said. "Through holding people accountable and thinking more deeply, I was able to have these constructive and



Some of his works are in the collections of the Whitney, the Walker Art Center and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Arden Wray for The New York Times

intense conversations with both my mom and dad over the last five, 10 years that have allowed us to all start healing and grieving and thinking about the next chapter of our lives with the baby.

“It came to a point now where I had to create, lead by example,” he continued. “I didn’t want to keep pointing the fingers like, ‘How could you put me through that crap?’ Or, ‘Where were you?’”

Born in Saint Paul, Minn., to a white mother and a Black father, Hall said he grew up being called names like “piss-colored” and “yellow boy.”

Hall initially wanted to be a photojournalist — “think Gordon Parks slash Langston Hughes” — but, after being moved to tears in front of a Henry Taylor painting at MoMA, ultimately realized art was his calling. He did a residency at Skowhegan in Maine. He studied under Catherine Opie at a residency in Florida.



“The Future and The Past (God is Us),” made this year by Chase Hall. David Kordansky Gallery. Photo Christopher Stach

“I had found painting, I had found other artists, I had found critical thinking,” he said. “All of these things came at a time when my life was completely falling apart. So it was this beautiful infrastructure for me.

“Oftentimes we speak about the art world as this kind of cherry on top, but it really wasn’t that for me,” he continued. “It was a substance. It was a lifeline. It was a community.”

Hall uses coffee as a pigment and cotton canvas — well aware that coffee and cotton were slave crops. “I use the coffee as a representation of Blackness, and I utilize the cotton as a representation of whiteness,” he said.

Akili Tommasino, an associate curator at the Met, said Hall “thinks of the material itself as a metaphor for the exploitation of people of African descent through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and generational enslavement,” calling the Met’s recent acquisition “one of Chase’s most developed works in terms of featuring the range of conceptual and aesthetic innovations that he’s been working on.”

Hall’s first solo gallery show opened at the Monique Meloche Gallery in Chicago in 2020, followed by one at the Clearing gallery in Brooklyn in 2021 and at Eva Presenhuber in Zurich in 2022.

He recently moved his home and studio to a remote part of upstate New York in part to get some distance from the frenzy of the art world and to establish an oasis of his own. Hall always yearned for that country house ideal, he said — “throw the ball with your brothers and sisters, run around with the dog, go fishing. These leisure moments or opportunities to relax and exist and be together.”

The artist said he now tried to take those contemplative moments with his new family, though this had been a radical adjustment from his former life of working day and night and going to gallery openings.

But despite his current more tranquil and bucolic existence, Hall clearly continues to grapple with the thorny issues of identity raised by his mixed race, using terms like "hybridity," "duality," and "palindromic."



Hall stood near his studio in West Park, N.Y. Arden Wray for The New York Times

"You're still marginalized because you're not 100 percent white, and you're still vilified — and not getting the complete love of what it would be to be completely Black, without a colonial genetic history," he said. "I am emboldening that confusion instead of running from it."

"Just as much as I am Black, I am white," Hall continued. "Until we tackle that mixedness that's only becoming more common around the world, we will always stay in the vacuums of these identities and races."

To be sure, Hall realizes that he will never be completely free of his troubled history (he said his uncle was killed by police and his aunt was murdered in a drug deal gone wrong). But he has tried to learn from it rather than repeat it. "Between my mom and dad, I had a lot of great examples of what not to do," he said.

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The artist has also developed an inner resilience that has enabled him to persevere and succeed. And, after so many years of having to fudge the facts about what his parents did, he said he's grown committed to truth-telling.

"How do I flip myself inside out and still stand tall and look you in the eyes and keep my chin up?" he said. "That's what my work is. It's not easy. It's damaging, it's burning a candle at both ends and it's the rage and the grin-and-bear-it that many of us deal with."

So while some young artists might struggle in the glare of art world fame, Hall said that pressure was a "piece of cake," given that he's sat in front of district attorneys watching his mother cry in handcuffs. "What is it like to be in the art world?" he said. "It's nothing compared to the real world."

Robin Pogrebin, who has been a reporter for The Times for nearly 30 years, covers arts and culture in California.

A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 27, 2024, Section F, Page 6 of the New York edition with the headline: Chase Hall Wrestles With 'Hybridity'.