

DAVID  
KORDANSKY  
GALLERY

Joel Mesler

*Surrender*

January 23 – March 6, 2021

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Surrender, an exhibition of new paintings and works on paper by Joel Mesler. This is the artist's first show at the gallery. Surrender opens on January 23 and remains on view through March 6, 2021.

In Joel Mesler's work, childhood memories fuel meditations on class, design, and popular iconography, not to mention the liquid, fluid, and mutable nature of the painting process. Surrender finds the artist exploring the power of acceptance, allowing emotions—as well as the physical and cultural forms in which they become constellated—to exist at the center of his project. It also finds him broadening his visual range, incorporating new motifs in the patterned backgrounds that provide the foundation for each composition and experimenting with new, increasingly elaborate ways of rendering typography.

The canvases in Surrender are sharply tuned juxtapositions of language and image in which resonant phrases appear in text that is itself a graphic construction, written in letters made to resemble milk, drinking straws, and condiments. In Untitled (Surrender), the painting that gives the show its title, elements from “Snakes and Ladders” and “Candyland”—board games whose images are imprinted upon the psyches of many children—have been recombined to create a document that is surreal and sanguine, menacing and self-effacing, sad and hilarious. Despite its universality, it is highly intimate; Mesler gives the impression that he is talking to himself as well as his audience at large, inviting reflections about the joys and disillusionments of childhood even as he addresses his own ongoing journey of self-awareness. At the same time, he invents a particularly contemporary sort of symbol-making, one that erases distinctions between signs of individual psychological evolution and waypoints in the landscape of consumer culture.

Many of the backgrounds against which Mesler's phrases appear are suffused with autobiographical import as well, evoking key—and often traumatic—moments from his past. Often this has emerged in his work as a localized phenomenon: the banana leaf pattern from the wallpaper inside the Beverly Hills Hotel, for instance, has served as a metonymic stand-in for a traumatic experience that signaled the deterioration of his parents' marriage, thereby fusing the drama of family dynamics and a storied site in Los Angeles. Here, this motif finds

monumental expression in Untitled (You Deserve Great Things), a major triptych that can be considered a culmination of this strand of the artist's project. It also appears in Untitled (In n Out), which evokes a happy-sad reckoning with lost innocence and the creature comforts, in the form of fast food and other cheap thrills, that once surrounded it.

Elsewhere in Surrender, however, Mesler expands this approach and engages more broadly with places and figures in the collective imagination. Untitled (Love, Hate) is one in an ongoing series of works to feature stylized renditions of tie-dye and other icons associated with hippie-style mind expansion. Here, the dark side of the utopian adolescent yearning for communion and its attendant, often drug-induced, catharses takes center stage: spelling out "love" and "hate" are letters formed from piles of cocaine. As in much of Mesler's work, however, the painting seems to suggest that the melancholic distance provided by age and nostalgia might be able to redeem youthful excess.

A group of works on paper constitute another important facet of the exhibition. Playful and exploratory, with jokey punchlines and sophisticated combinations of color and texture, each has been executed on a David Kordansky Gallery exhibition poster from the early 2000s. This unorthodox choice of support creates a bridge between various moments in time and maps the artist's own internal dialogue onto a public record of artmaking. The capsule history of the gallery, however obscured and redacted by virtue of Mesler's marks and swaths of color, roots his painterly ruminations in the place where they are being shown. Furthermore, it provides a ground upon which he can directly address his journey as both an artist and a dealer—not to mention his formative years in Los Angeles—and the trials and triumphs that have made the last two decades an unlikely story of personal and professional homecoming.

Joel Mesler (b. 1974, Los Angeles) has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at Harper's Books, East Hampton, New York (2020); Simon Lee, London (2018); and Galerie TORRI, Paris (2016). He lives and works in East Hampton, New York.

**Joel Mesler**  
**Surrender**  
**January 23 - March 6, 2021**

**North Gallery**



**Joel Mesler**  
*Untitled (Surrender), 2020*  
pigment on linen  
80 x 70 x 1 1/2 inches  
(203.2 x 177.8 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.046)



**Joel Mesler**  
*Untitled (In n Out), 2020*  
pigment on linen  
84 x 65 x 1 1/2 inches  
(213.4 x 165.1 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.003)



**Joel Mesler**  
*Untitled (Don't Cry), 2020*  
pigment on linen  
80 x 70 x 1 1/2 inches  
(203.2 x 177.8 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.048)



**Joel Mesler**  
*Untitled (Love, Hate), 2020*  
pigment on linen  
80 x 70 x 1 1/2 inches  
(203.2 x 177.8 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.045)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Jew)*, 2020  
pigment on linen  
80 x 70 x 1 1/2 inches  
(203.2 x 177.8 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.008)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Three Way)*, 2020  
pigment on linen  
80 x 70 x 1 1/2 inches  
(203.2 x 177.8 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.052)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Half Full)*, 2020  
pigment on linen  
84 x 65 x 1 1/2 inches  
(213.4 x 165.1 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.004)

**Viewing Room**



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled Triptych (You Deserve Great Things)*, 2020  
pigment on linen  
three parts, each:  
80 x 70 x 1 1/2 inches  
(203.2 x 177.8 x 3.8 cm)  
overall dimensions:  
80 x 210 x 1 1/2 inches  
(203.2 x 533.4 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.047)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Sunny Side)*, 2020  
acrylic on poster  
17 x 11 inches  
(43.2 x 27.9 cm)  
framed:  
19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches  
(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)  
(Inv# JME 20.024)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (It's Time to Say Hello), 2020*

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.020)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Hopes and Dreams), 2020*

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.026)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Dancer), 2020*

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.012)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Joel's Drawing), 2020*

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.013)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Thank You), 2020*

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.010)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (I Could Have Tried Harder),*  
2020

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.031)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Palette 1),* 2020

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.037)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Feeling Pretty OK),* 2020

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

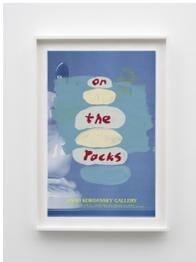
(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.033)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (On the Rocks),* 2020

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.018)



**Joel Mesler**

*Untitled (Money Snake),* 2020

acrylic on poster

17 x 11 inches

(43.2 x 27.9 cm)

framed:

19 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

(49.5 x 34.3 x 3.8 cm)

(Inv# JME 20.025)

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

## JOEL MESLER

born 1974  
lives and works in Sag Harbor, NY

### EDUCATION

1999 MFA San Francisco Art Institute

### SELECTED SOLO / TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

(\*indicates a publication)

- 2021 *Surrender*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2020 *Show Schmo*, Harper's Apartment, New York, NY
- 2018 *The Alphabet of Creation (For Now)*, Simon Lee Gallery, London, England
- 2017 *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, Kantor Gallery, Beverly Hills, CA
- 2005 Black Dragon Society, Los Angeles, CA

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

(\*indicates a publication)

- 2019 *Summer Rental*, Rental Gallery, East Hampton, NY  
*Brand X: 40 Years*, Pace Gallery, New York, NY  
*Malmö Sessions*, Carl Kostyál, Malmö, Sweden
- 2008 *Pop-Auge und die ewigen Quatschkommoden Deutsche und Amerikanische Kunst seit 1999*, Patrick Painter, Inc., Santa Monica, CA

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- 2019 "From the Mark Hotel to Frieze, Joel Mesler's Portraits Add Accessibility to the Art World," *A Hotel Life*, May 1, 2019  
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- 2018 Kachka, Boris, "How an Art Dealer Became an Up-and-Coming Painter," *The New York Times Style Magazine*, June 19, 2018  
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- 2017 Dafoe, Taylor, "Talk About Vertical Integration! At NADA Miami, Joel Mesler Will Be the Dealer, the Artist, the Art Handler, and the PR Agent," *artnet news*, December 4, 2017  
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Shaw, Anne, "In the wake of a wave of closures, galleries are adapting to survive," *The Art Newspaper*, July 12, 2017  
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- 2015 Chu, Christine, "5 Legendary Art Dealers Who Struggled Before They Made It Big," *artnet news*, September 21, 2015  
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Mesler, Joel, "True Confessions of a Justified Art Dealer, Part Five: Goodbye to All That," *ARTnews*, April 13, 2015  
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Mesler, Joel, "True Confessions of a Justified Art Dealer, Part Four: Up All Night in the Dream Factory," *ARTnews*, March 3, 2015  
Mesler, Joel, "True Confessions of a Justified Art Dealer, Part Three: Downhill All the Way," *ARTnews*, February 11, 2015  
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- 2014 Mesler, Joel, "True Confessions of a Justified Art Dealer, Part One: Safe and Warm in L.A.," *ARTnews*, December 2, 2014
- 2010 "Joel Mesler," *Art in America*, March 29, 2010
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## The New York Times

### Eastward, Ho! Even Art Is Leaving for the Hamptons

With vacation homes becoming full-time residences because of the coronavirus pandemic, New York galleries are opening outposts to be near collectors.

Ted Loos | July 12, 2020



A wave of new galleries on Newtown Lane in East Hampton includes Sotheby's, Skarstedt and Van de Weghe. Credit Karsten Moran for The New York Times

EAST HAMPTON, N.Y. — The art collectors were finally coming out of hiding here recently, albeit quietly and tentatively. The artists were, too.

The lure? All of a sudden, they have a lot more gallery options lining the immaculate streets of this famously upscale summer town, a seemingly unexpected development in the middle of a pandemic.

Since the beginning of June, five major art galleries have opened here: Pace, Skarstedt, Van de Weghe, Michael Werner and Sotheby's, all arms of New York art powerhouses.

And more are on the way soon, in Montauk (Amalia Dayan and Adam Lindemann's new venture, South Etna Montauk) and Southampton (Hauser & Wirth).

"Selfishly, I'm totally into it," the artist Rashid Johnson, a Bridgehampton resident, said of the new spaces. "I miss seeing good art." Mr. Johnson, like every civic-minded person I met, was wearing a mask.

New York's top dealers, artists and collectors have long vacationed here. But now that they have been living here during the pandemic, some gallerists are for the first time seeing the Hamptons as "something more than a playground," the artist Clifford Ross, a longtime area denizen, said.

I drove out for the day to check out the newly burgeoning scene. When I stopped by Rental Gallery, on Newtown Lane, which has been open for three years, I ran into Mr. Johnson, a close friend of Rental's owner, **Joel Mesler**, his neighbor in Bridgehampton. In the front of the gallery, part of a July group show called "Friend of Ours," hangs an untitled, blood-red drawing of Mr. Johnson's born of pandemic anxiety.

Mr. Johnson wasn't thrilled with the framing (too thick, he said), and as we were talking, he was recognized by two collectors, Erica Seidel and Tom Deighton, who are engaged.

Loos, Ted, "Eastward, Ho! Even Art Is Leaving for the Hamptons," *NYTimes.com*, July 12, 2020



Per Skarstedt, right, in the new Skarstedt East Hampton gallery space, which features, from left, Willem de Kooning's "Untitled VII" (1986); Richard Prince's "3 Jokes Painted To Death or 3 Jokes Really Painted" (1987); and Eric Fischl's painting, "Like Explaining the End of the World to a Dog" (2020). Credit The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Eric Fischl/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Karsten Moran for The New York Times

"We own one of your pieces," Mr. Deighton, a real estate developer, said to Mr. Johnson, referring to a mixed media work.

Mr. Deighton seemed energized to run into an artist whose work he collects. "A big part of what we do is not investing in art, but getting to know the artists and riding the wave with them," he said. A wave seemed like a good seaside metaphor for the sudden cresting of galleries here.

Mr. Deighton and Ms. Seidel had just been to Pace's new branch, which had opened that very day, to see the current show, of works by Yoshitomo Nara, another artist they admire.

To them, more gallery options were an unalloyed good, though Mr. Deighton added that he hoped they would give a spotlight to emerging artists and not just famous names.

Traffic was getting bad as the Fourth of July approached, but I braved Montauk Highway to visit veteran collector Leonard Riggio, the founder of Barnes & Noble, who keeps a museum-worthy trove of outdoor sculptures at his estate, starting with a massive Richard Serra work on his front lawn.

Given that outdoor chats are preferred these days, we went out to his back patio and sat under an umbrella as it started to drizzle. He noted that though his collecting has slowed a bit, he was still buying, and he had unsuccessfully bid on a Donald Judd work the week before in a Sotheby's sale.

"You could say they're following one another," said Mr. Riggio of the eastward gallery movement. "But perhaps better to say they have common wisdom."

The development is a "big benefit" for him and his fellow collectors, said Mr. Riggio, a longtime friend and client of the Glimcher family, the owners of Pace. (He said he planned to check out the new branch soon.)

I stopped by Pace — where only 10 people are allowed in the gallery at a time and masks are required — to talk to Marc Glimcher, who was seated in the V.I.P. area at the back of his new space, which used to be Vered Gallery. Behind him was an Agnes Martin painting, and in front of him was a glowing James Turrell work. There was a small Alexander Calder sculpture in a crate, too.

Mr. Glimcher had Covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, in March and has since recovered. "This gallery came out of our being sick," Mr. Glimcher said, noting that his wife, Fairfax Dorn, who also had Covid-19, told him, "When we get better, we should open out here." East Hampton is now the seventh city in which Pace has a branch.

Online exhibitions don't quite cut it, Mr. Glimcher said, and being surrounded by affluent collectors in the Hamptons is helpful for a gallery in that it nurtures relationships.



Rashid Johnson's oil on cotton rag work "Untitled Anxious Red Drawing" (2020) hangs near the entrance to Rental Gallery. Credit Karsten Moran for The New York Times

"Our fuel comes from people being in front of art," he said.

Mr. Glimcher's father, the Pace founder Arne Glimcher, has been coming to the area since the 1970s. "The big change is that the spaces out here weren't run by the big New York galleries," he said. "It was more local." And that closer-to-home focus included the artists that were shown. He added: "Coming to East Hampton was not about doing business. It was to get away from the gallery. It's ironic that we have a gallery now."

He chuckled, adding, "But the collectors are here, and the work has to be seen."

Another veteran, Helen A. Harrison, the director of Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center here, said the international vibe of the new entries was "unusual" for the area; the only comparison she could think of was before her time, the legendary 1957-60 Signa Gallery, a pioneering showcase for modern art, founded by the collector and artist Alfonso Ossorio with John Little and Elizabeth Parker, two other artists who had settled in East Hampton. It featured Abstract Expressionist masters like Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock but faded with the coming of Pop Art.

And incursions from Manhattan have not always gelled. Ms. Harrison recalled that in 1981, a high-profile collaboration from dealers Leo Castelli, Marian Goodman and Holly Solomon was launched in East Hampton to great fanfare.

"It failed," Ms. Harrison said. "People didn't open their wallets. They were showing the same people as in Manhattan, but people went back there to do the buying."

Failure is relative, of course — at the high-flying level of Castelli, the Glimchers and others, an extra gallery can be a pleasant experiment that doesn't make or break their business. Pace's lease is only until October, but other dealers in the new crowd have been more ready to commit for the long haul.

Both Christophe Van de Weghe and Per Skarstedt — whose galleries, along with a Sotheby's space offering art, jewelry and watches, are all lined up near each other along Newtown Lane — have signed three-year leases. Mr. Skarstedt, who has been living nearby for four months, said opening a branch was "definitely a pandemic decision."

He added: "A lot of our clients moved out here too. And most people will stay till Labor Day or longer."

I checked out the blue-chip art he had on display, which now includes a Willem de Kooning painting and works by Eric Fischl, Jeff Koons, Sue Williams and Christopher Wool.

Mr. Skarstedt noted that locals were just becoming aware of the gallery's presence. "We're averaging 20 people a day, more on the weekend," he said. He said the visitors had mostly complied with pandemic safety, too, with a notable exception. "Only one guy came in without a mask," Mr. Skarstedt said. "And he was 85."



Face, which has opened up an outpost in East Hampton, is exhibiting works by Yoshitomo Nara, and, at left, by James Turrell. Credit Karsten Moran for The New York Times

None of the dealers seemed fazed by a lack of crowds.

Eric Firestone — who has had a prime corner location in East Hampton for 10 years — said: “If it’s a great beach day, people aren’t coming in. And the newcomers will figure that out.”

Mr. Firestone also has a gallery in Manhattan, and said he specializes in “postwar American artists, with strong emphasis on people who were missed or slighted, like Joe Overstreet and Mimi Gross.” He currently is showing work in East Hampton by the African-American painter Varnette Patricia Honeywood (1950-2010), whose works celebrating Black life were included in the set decoration for “The Cosby Show.”

What of the new competition for collector eyes and pocketbooks? Mr. Mesler of Rental Gallery said he welcomed the big gallery branches, given that all the dealers have different specialties. “The water’s warm,” he said, by way of invitation, adding, “I’m shocked it took a pandemic to get them to do this.”

Restlessness was the driver for Gordon VeneKlasen, the co-owner of Michael Werner Gallery, who has a house in Springs.

“I can’t take it anymore,” Mr. VeneKlasen said. “I need to see art. There was a space available and I said, ‘Great’ and I got the key.” The first show, “Sigmar Polke, Francis Picabia and Friends,” opened on Friday.

When I drove to Southampton to see Hauser & Wirth’s new space, slated to open at the end of July, I was met by Marc Payot, the gallery’s president. At two floors and 5,000 square feet, it’s among the largest of the new galleries.

“This was a no-brainer,” Mr. Payot said of the gallery’s yearlong lease, in a space sandwiched between home décor and cheese shops.

Mr. Payot, who has a home locally, was thinking about what to hang in the front window, and he was considering an LED piece. “I’m thinking of hanging a Jenny Holzer so you can see it at night,” he said.

Given the spate of galleries arriving, it could serve as an “open for business” sign for the Hamptons at large.



## An Inside Look Into Joel Mesler's Art Gallery

Maggie Klimuszko | September 19, 2019



Joel Mesler's *The Alphabet of Creation (For Now)* at Simon Lee Gallery in London

Hamptonite and artist Joel Mesler talks art, family and his East Hampton gallery.

When curator and painter Joel Mesler first moved from L.A. to NYC, it wasn't for the art or culture—he was following a girl. Though the romance didn't work out, the East Coast certainly did, inspiring a life-long love. Mesler spent most of his time running a Lower East Side gallery and painting on the side. Though he was a late-blooming artist, Mesler's hobby turned into a career with wildly successful shows such as *The Alphabet of Creation (For Now)* series inspired by The Beverly Hills Hotel.



Mesler in front of "Untitled (I'm moonlighting)."

As a budding star artist with three kids, Mesler was ready for a new chapter. "NYC no longer embraced us," he says. "We wanted trees and wild turkeys, so we moved out East."

He finds that the space, time and light the East End provides inspire his work. His series Fish People was particularly influenced by the Hamptons, as The Surf Lodge held the exhibit. "I make work consciously keeping in mind where it will be shown," he says of the paintings that depict business people going to work in beach formal gear alongside phrases such as "Down and Out in Montauk" and "It's time to leave NY."

Mesler plans to take frequent trips with his family to the Sag Harbor Bay, work on his art and man his Rental Gallery in East Hampton this summer. "Having a seasonal gallery in a seasonal location was



A painting Mesler did of chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten as part of a residency with The Mark Hotel in NYC

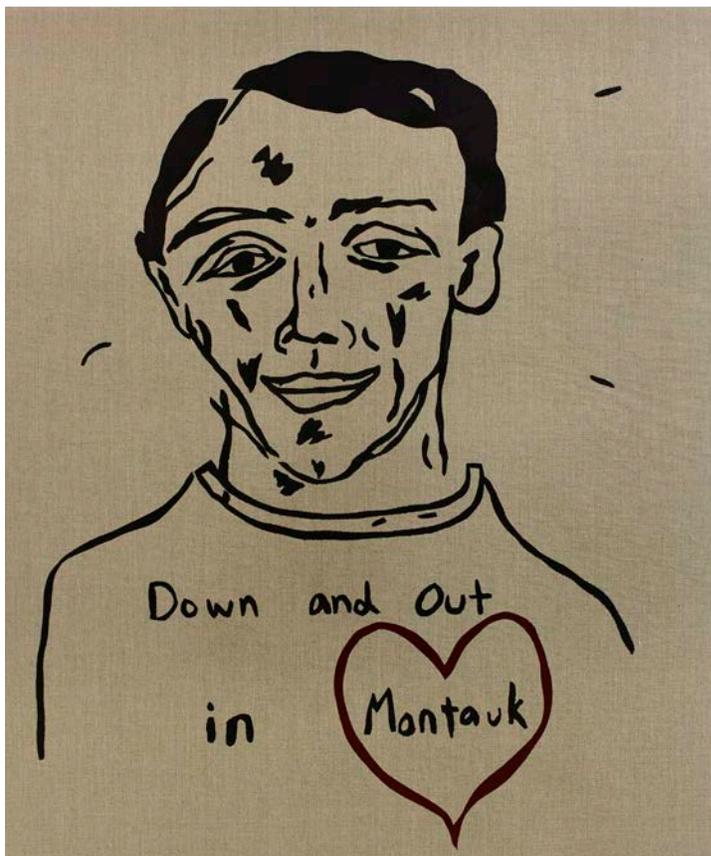
always frowned upon while living my adult career in the art world, but the world has shifted a bit, and it is seemingly now an advantage to be in a location like this rather than a major city like NYC or L.A.," Mesler says.

He mentions that a stellar show curated by David Salle and Nicole Wittenberg will be open through summer at Rental Gallery. As for his future in the Hamptons, Mesler is most excited to watch his children grow up and experience the joy that one can only achieve in the Hamptons. *87 Newtown Lane, East Hampton*

# 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?

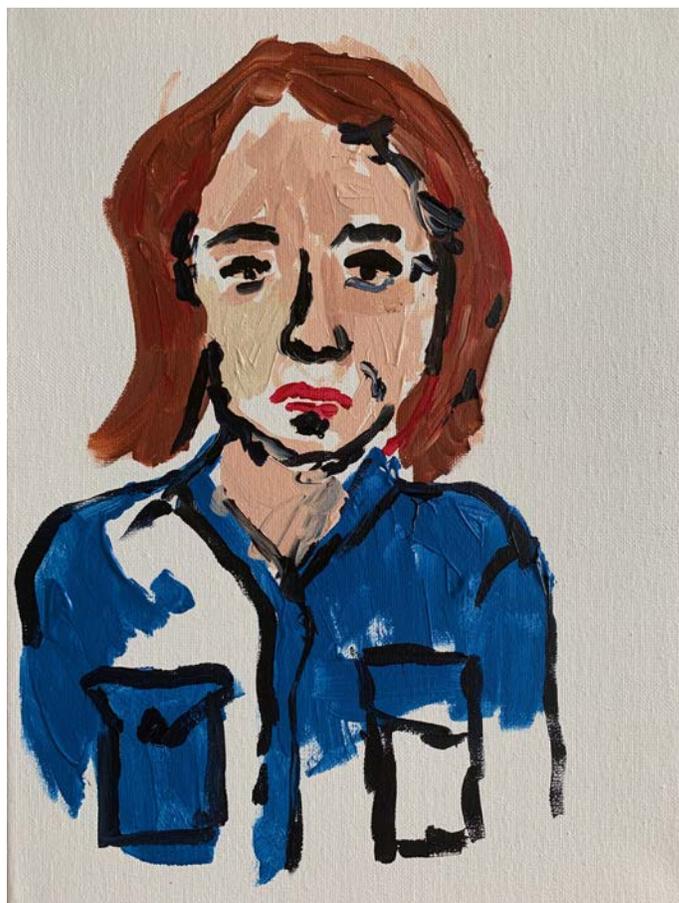
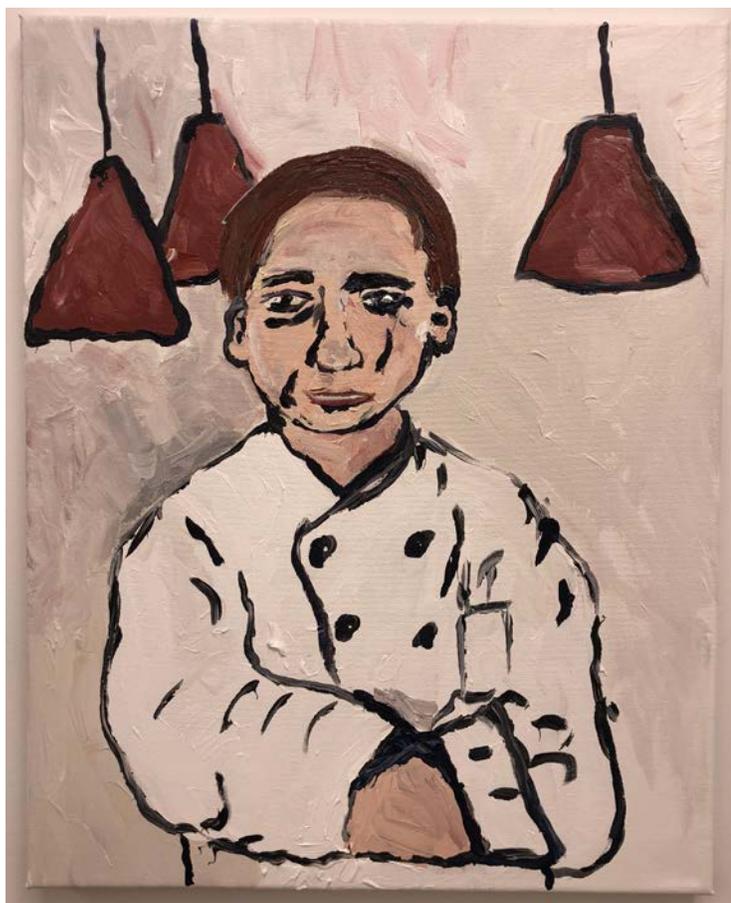
**Joel Mesler:** It's definitely an intuitive feel, I think. Once you've seen somebody that has what it takes, I guess, they can't do anything else, and in order to be successful out there, you have to keep doing it. I mean it's a mix of so many things. I'm working with a young artist now, we are actually 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.

Goldstein, Caroline, "Ferrying to Frieze? Artist and Dealer Joel Mesler Will Paint Your Portrait On the Way to the Art-Fair Island," *Artnet.com*, April 23, 2019

artnet®

## Ferrying to Frieze? Artist and Dealer Joel Mesler Will Paint Your Portrait On the Way to the Art-Fair Island

Riders can commission a portrait for \$100 a pop.

Caroline Goldstein | April 23, 2019



Joel Mesler painting Henri Neuendorf's portrait at Independent 2019. Joel at work during Independent New York 2019. Courtesy of Henri Nuendorf.

Those who ride the ferry from Manhattan's 35th Street to Randall's Island next month to attend Frieze New York could be treated to an on-deck portrait session, courtesy of the artist and dealer Joel Mesler.

Mesler, who currently runs Rental Gallery in East Hampton, is a veteran of the New York art market, but has been revisiting his own creative inclinations since moving away from the city a few years ago and embracing a new sober lifestyle. The idea to stage impromptu portraiture first came to Mesler two years ago at NADA Miami. "I had sold out my booth of paintings of my own work at NADA two years ago and while I was talking to [publicist] Adam Abdalla about being bored with nothing to do for four days, he suggested painting portraits for people for me to stay busy. The rest is history."

Ranging from a mere \$100-250—less, perhaps, than an evening of cocktails and dinner in New York—Mesler is offering buyers a unique, on-the-spot portrait (available for both humans and non-humans).

"It's a little disconcerting," said one sitter, Henri Neuendorf—who happens to be a specialist at artnet Auctions—of his experience sitting for Mesler during the 2019 Independent art fair. "You can't see what he's doing, and he's painting, and then looking at you quite intensely, and you get very curious. There were lots of people walking by, and so you could sort of tell by their facial expressions if the painting was turning out any good... and Joel was very open about saying it might turn out bad, that he's not technically a portraitist."

One attendee remarked that Neuendorf's portrait looked like Queen Elizabeth, but Mesler claimed it was one of the best he'd done all day. For those not attending Frieze, Mesler will also be painting portraits in the lobby of the Mark hotel on April 27 and 28.

Ferry riders will pay \$100 for a bespoke watercolor portrait done on the cover of Mesler's new book, which is based on past "live sessions," featuring more than 80 portraits of fellow fair-goers, published by Harper's Books and White Columns.

## The New York Times

# How an Art Dealer Became an Up-and-Coming Painter

Joel Mesler ran a successful gallery on the Lower East Side for years. Then he left the city and started a new chapter.

Boris Kachka | June 19, 2018



Joel Mesler, a former Manhattan gallery owner, at his home in Sag Harbor. Sean Donnola

ONE SPRING AFTERNOON at the Rental Gallery, a cedar-shingled storefront 1,000 feet from the East Hampton train station and 100 miles from the capital of the art world, Joel Mesler — part-time dealer, late-blooming art star, recovering alcoholic — is in the middle of an anecdote when his iPhone buzzes, nearly launching him off a Nakashima couch. An auction app is soliciting bids on an unsigned print by the illustrator Ben Shahn. “It’s probably gonna go for \$250,” Mesler says, frantically tapping in \$10 increments. “But I will treasure it. It’s great because it says on top, ‘We Shall Overcome.’”

We’re in what Mesler calls his “fake office,” where the 44-year-old former owner of mid-tier New York galleries now closes sales to the city’s summering overclass. An early champion of African-American artists like Henry Taylor and Rashid Johnson, Mesler is selling a Taylor on the far wall, a canvas mounted with detergent bottles painted black, for \$45,000. Mesler’s own recent paintings — lush post-traumatic allegories styled as alphabetic letters — sold out for \$12,000 apiece the previous week at London’s Simon Lee Gallery, along with 40-odd 15-minute stunt portraits (which Simon Lee himself calls “terrible”) that each cost more than the Shahn print. But when Mesler lands the winning bid at exactly \$250, he whoops in triumph. “That’s awesome that I called that!”

Mesler’s “real office” is upstairs, a cluttered nook presided over by paintings of rabbis. Upstairs is also where, in the long Hamptons off-season, he paints. But Memorial Day isn’t far off, and Mesler is transitioning into downstairs mode, a fidgety and neurotic state. “You want to put your bag down?” he asks when I arrive. “You want an espresso?” A neighbor recently gave him a Nespresso machine, “and it’s changed my life.”

In almost two decades as a dealer in both Los Angeles and New York, Mesler has searched for ways to make a small gallery successful in the face of the art world’s corporate greed, deploying a number of tricks, from renting out his space to other galleries, to going into



A section of Joel Mesler's series "The Alphabet of Creation (For Now)" at his recent solo show at Simon Lee Gallery in London. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery; photo: Todd-White Art Photography

business with more successful ones, to finally decamping from a major city altogether. Until recently, painting was a pastime, overshadowed by his career of discovering and selling other artists. Within about 10 minutes of my arrival, Mesler — healthily pudgy, wearing a two-day beard and the resting expression of a puppy whose owner just pulled up to the house — is already deep in the weeds on his most ambitious project: almost two years of sobriety. "All of a sudden you take away the booze, which was your medicine to cope," he says, "and you're like, 'How do I deal with this?' Most people become terrible, their wives hate them, and they become a mess. You take away the thing, and they become a void."

Mesler is filling that void with paint. He's always been an artist, but he's only gotten good — and marketable — by locating what he calls "the story beneath the story" of his work. Most of his alphabet paintings feature a letter formed by a snake, which slithers through palm fronds evoking both Eden and the wallpaper of the Beverly Hills Hotel. When he first started showing them, "People thought it was a prank: 'Joke's on you, you gave me twelve grand!' Because, to be honest, I've done" things "like that in the past," he said. His paintings are certainly clever, but it's becoming clear, even to those who once dismissed him, that they're no joke.

DOWN IN RENTAL'S basement is the ephemera of Mesler's life — an installation in search of a gallery. There are files from Mesler v. Mesler, his parents' complicated and rancorous divorce case. Mesler's Orthodox Jewish immigrant grandfather made a fortune in wire-hanger manufacturing; his father, Morris, a doctor, blew most of it on pharmaceutical-grade cocaine. His mother, Laura, endured with the help of alcohol and an affair.

The hotel wallpaper conceit came to Mesler as a flash of sense memory, a poisoned madeleine. While brainstorming for a 2017 exhibition of Mesler's work called "Down and Out in Beverly Hills," the art dealer who curated the show texted him a photo from the Beverly Hills Hotel. "I remembered scratching the wallpaper, having it in my nails," says Mesler. He cast himself back to a family Easter brunch there that ended when Morris Mesler tossed the table, splattering eggs Benedict on his wife's lap and shouting, "I can't take it anymore!" Eleven-year-old Joel chased his manic father out the door, while his mother followed behind in their tan Mercedes station wagon. "This is where my next body of work is coming from," says Mesler, "from this exact moment in the Mercedes." Upstairs is a canvas patterned with "caramels and tans and burgundies" — attempts to invoke the car's design.

After the divorce, the family Mercedes gave way to a "Saab with a muffler on the ground," and one of the richest kids in school was suddenly begging to be dropped off a block away. That's when Mesler became the hustler he is today. He started selling Ecstasy and quaaludes stolen from his father and tooth whitener ordered in Dr. Mesler's name. "It's more of a survival thing than it is entrepreneurial," he says. "Just, how do I get the Mercedes back?"



"L" is for Los Angeles — a painting from Mesler's "The Alphabet of Creation (For Now)" series. Joel Mesler, "Untitled (L)," 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery

Mesler was a landlord before he was an art dealer. While earning his M.F.A. at the San Francisco Art Institute, he put his subsidized loan into high-yield accounts, paid the principal back right after graduation and pocketed the interest. After striking out as a painter, he borrowed \$30,000 from his mother and bought a building in Los Angeles's Chinatown, which was transforming into an arts district. One of his renters was David Kordansky, a serious-minded dealer whose gallery soon took off.

Mesler ran a printing press in the front, where he also lived — landlord and squatter both. "Joel was a pain in the ass," Kordansky remembers now. (Mesler agrees.) "He was this pseudo-beatnik, taking showers in the middle of the day while I'd have clients in the gallery — just a dirty bum type character who did nothing but get in my way." When he finally started a space of his own, a 2003 *LA Weekly* profile headlined "The Jester" described a Mesler opening as though it were an "S.N.L." Stefon sketch: "phony 'fashion shows,' lap dancers from Jumbo's Clown Room, guys in dog suits performing pop-rock hits in Scooby-Doo voices; a twisted minstrel calling himself Mr. Banjo, who sat atop a 10-foot-high stool performing murder ballads and sea chanteys peppered with tasteless jokes about child molestation; and, of course, the Nude Breakdancer."

A child of squandered privilege, Mesler agitated against gentrification by "round-eyes" even as he was profiting off white colonizers. When a favorite Chinese souvenir shop closed across the street, he replicated it in his gallery, selling the store's mugs for either \$2.50 (regular price) or \$250 (as "found art"). His eventual journey from gritty preservationist to full-time resident of Sag Harbor, the East Coast's new-money epicenter, makes sense when you think of what survival meant to the young striver — getting the Mercedes back. Soon after moving out here, he bought a Mercedes S.U.V. with a caramel interior.

MESLER'S WIFE, SARAH AIBEL, usually drives the Mercedes, so we take his black Honda pickup to the home he shares with Aibel, their 4½-year-old son and twin 2½-year-old daughters. On the way, he dissects the crisis that hastened their escape from New York. After moving to the city from Los Angeles in 2006, Mesler attempted to paint again, but his work represented little more than "someone hungry and desperate and scared wanting to be an artist." His dealer refused to display it at the Armory Show, so instead Mesler made copies of something truly original, a video of his own birth. He watched as, day by day, the TV monitor was moved further away from fairgoers and eventually switched off for good. "It was literally that torture of 'There goes my art career.'"

Mesler's third attempt at painting preceded his sobriety; it precipitated his dive to the bottom. In 2014, he had merged galleries with the dealer Zach Feuer; inside of a year, Feuer wanted out. "I was hoping he was going to be my enabler," Mesler says now. As he wound down their business, Aibel became pregnant with the twins. Overwhelmed, he started spending nights with a bottle of vodka and some Ambien and making art while the world faded. "I'd give my wife my keys and my phone and be like, 'I'm going away now.'" He keeps a portfolio of those drawings in his bedroom; they look like scrawls made by Egon Schiele in, well, an Ambien blackout.



Joel Mesler at home with his wife, Sarah Aibel, and kids. Sean Donnola



Rental Gallery in East Hampton. Courtesy of Rental Gallery

The artist Rashid Johnson, Mesler's close friend and erstwhile drinking partner, was freshly sober at the time. He gently recommended a therapist who was secretly an addiction specialist. She suggested that Mesler go two days a week without drinking. He couldn't do it. Then, one night, he fled to a painting studio the family owned in Callicoon, N.Y. — a 2,000-square-foot money pit and another fault line in the marriage. He started painting, downed a bottle of Tito's and woke up the following morning with a packet of turkey in his hand and not much of a painting. He quit drinking a couple of weeks later. (These days he paints while listening to recordings of recovering addicts.)

Then came an even harder challenge. Three children made city life unsustainable even if they could afford it — and they couldn't. While closing out the gallery, Mesler looked for work with the same corporate galleries that had largely eaten up the talent he had discovered. "Every single artist that Joel's ever told me to buy has ended up having a career," says Adam Cohen, a friend who works at Gagosian. "But it is impossible to compete in the art business once the artist gets to a certain level." Mesler was a victim of his own keen eye, and now the mega-galleries told him he'd be a bad fit. They didn't need Mesler; they already had some of his artists.

Once again, Johnson saved them. While showing Mesler's earliest sober work in Montauk, the family stayed with Johnson in Bridgehampton — and had an idea. They could move out here and Mesler could revive a business model he'd tried before, a non-exclusive "rental" gallery. Instead of representing artists full time, he could host shows four months out of the year. The rest of the time, he could paint.

Within days, the couple had made an offer on a handsome gray saltbox on 3.6 wooded acres. As Mesler stops his pickup at the gate leading up to the house, he tells me what surprises him most about this phase of his life. "It's actually working," he says. "We're living."

WHILE MESLER STANDS on the back patio detailing his only moderately grandiose plans for the "little kibbutz compound" — a multi-tiered garden, an amphitheater, a safe room "in case the Nazis come" — Aibel joins us, wearing a stylish black romper and balancing a daughter on her hip. "As soon as we hit on this, we knew," she says. "Joel has this ability to will things into being." Aibel marvels at the quality of her husband's recent art. "I was a curator for 10 years," she says. "I was like, 'These are legitimately good paintings!'" About his earlier "alcoholic oil paintings," she's more diplomatic. "They're amazing but also like, super-unrefined. And you could never have continued making those paintings because you'd be dead."

Death seems to hover over the ensuing conversation. When she says Mesler "could sell ice to an Eskimo," he says, "It's like I'm dead!" He gives an elaborate explanation for stamping all his work "The Estate of Joel Mesler," which involves the art-world obsession with provenance but boils down to a reformed reprobate's newfound respect for the brevity of life. "It's all being made," he says, "until it's no longer made anymore."



Mesler's portrait of the article's author, Boris Kachka. Joel Mesler; courtesy of Boris Kachka

Kordansky, who's seen his work from the beginning ("very poor man's Chagall paintings"), says Mesler has finally learned a language of his own, "more sophisticated in terms of creating a kind of symbolism of the personal narrative." He now collects Mesler's work. "Maybe, just maybe, down the line," the dealer says, "there'll be an exhibition with Joel." Johnson thinks his friend's "palate is beautiful" and his style polished but seemingly handmade, evoking his history as a printer. "I think he's at that point where he's finding his voice," he says.

Mesler is pleased that most of the people who buy his art are not his gallery customers. "When you're selling other people's art, you say what needs to be said, but when you're making your own work, you want to be as honest and direct as possible." Buyers of his work are his "kings," but he's still canny about protecting his market against speculators. "I'm very aware of who has my work," he says, wary of collectors "who buy with their ears," following trends, "and not their eyes."

"The art world's full of people craning their necks and looking for the next thing," says Lee. "People are waiting with bated breath to see if it succeeds or fails. He likes to portray himself as very fallible, and I think it's all bound up into a fascinating boom-or-bust type of thing." The Rental Gallery thrives on that same sense of novelty. "I'm doing more business with people from the city than I did when I was in the city," says Mesler. But Mesler's gallery isn't just about "shopping," as Cohen puts it. "It's the first art-world concept gallery in the Hamptons," says Cohen. "Joel has brought some sense of cool to it."

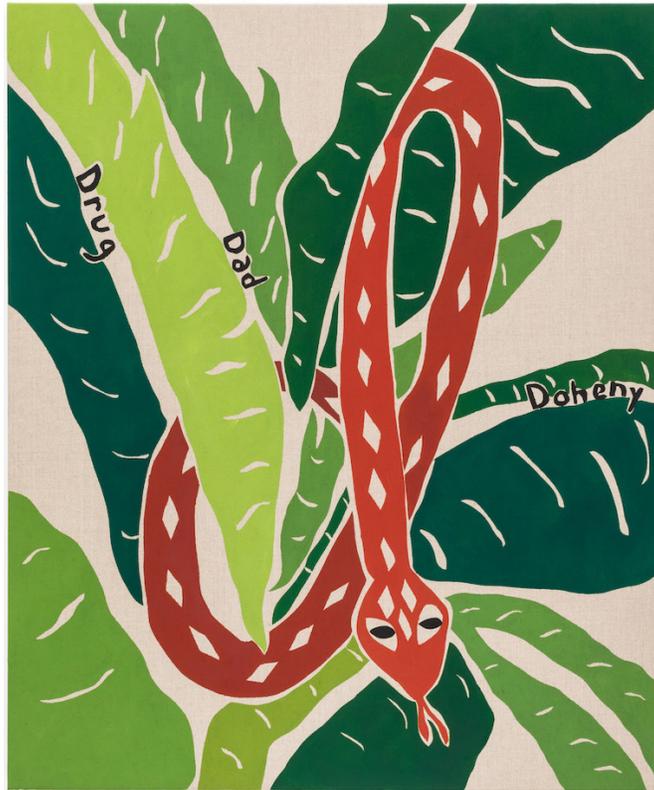
During my visit, Rental was exhibiting a young artist named Cameron Welch: vivid, jagged mosaics made out of debris from the streets of Brooklyn's Crown Heights. "He's gonna be a star," says Mesler. "You buy him and keep him close. It would be so easy," he says, to slip back into representing someone like him. "But he's gonna find a really good dealer," not a part-timer like him. It wouldn't be a healthy dynamic for Mesler, either. "I feel like I have to have a sponsor to call: 'Put the phone down, Joel, don't do it!'"

We leave the family compound for the gallery with just enough time for Mesler to paint my portrait. "I try to tell everybody I don't know how to paint, that this is half shtick," he says, standing behind a comically tiny travel easel. Trying not to move much, I wonder to myself whether his midlife turnaround, so new and fragile, will really last. What happens when real critics chime in on his work, when the novelty of his art and his gallery wear off, when the busy season ends on Newtown Lane for the fifth or 10th time and winter sets in again? I ask Kordansky this a week later. "It's the Jewish thing to worry about where he'll be in 10 years," he says, before reciting the famous mantra of recovery: "One day at a time."

## ARTnews

### Dear Painter, Paint for Me: Artist and Dealer Joel Mesler Will Make Portraits at London Show

By Andrew Russeth | April 10, 2018



Joel Mesler, *Untitled (d)*, 2018, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SIMON LEE

"This is the first time I've had anyone offer me window or aisle seats," Joel Mesler said in an interview yesterday, enthusiastically describing the preparations that the blue-chip London gallery Simon Lee made for him to travel to his upcoming show there. "I was like, 'Are you kidding?' They were like, 'Is economy-plus OK?'" Mesler laughed in awe. "I'm so appreciative. I've been through the war and know the other side—how, especially for a struggling mid-tier gallery, you want to get them on the cheapest flight you can. They were like, 'Whatever you need.' I couldn't believe it was for me!"

Mesler has, indeed, been on the opposite end of such discussions, historically speaking. He is best known as an art dealer who has operated a number of mid-tier galleries over the years. He was involved in running Feuer/Mesler and Untitled in New York, along with a couple other spaces in various locales, and he now owns Rental gallery in East Hampton. (Full disclosure: he's also a sometimes ARTnews columnist.) But recently he has picked up the art career he set aside to focus on dealing, and has been making spare, wry paintings that owe a bit to New Yorker cartoons and David Shrigley's more deadpan moments. In one recent work, a quick sketch of an elderly man who might be Picasso accompanies cur-sive script that reads, "I was almost someone."

In London, Mesler will offer up paintings of foliage inspired by the leafy wallpaper of the Beverly Hills Hotel, "where I spent a lot of my childhood," he told me. "The darkness of my parents' divorce culminated at that hotel. So when most people see luxury and happiness, I just see destruction and bankruptcy."

A red snake in each painting spells out a different letter of the alphabet, accompanied by various words beginning with that same letter. "What I wanted to do was go through my childhood and do it kind of sys-

Russeth, Andrew, "Dear Painter, Paint for Me: Artist and Dealer Joel Mesler Will Make Portraits at London Show," *ARTnews.com*, April 10, 2018



Joel Mesler, *Untitled (k)*, 2018. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SIMON LEE GALLERY

temically through using the alphabet, mining my childhood memories of the streets that were important to me, the places, the things that kind of stuck out," Mesler said. "They started very conservative, and, as the letters went, they got more and more bizarre and strange. B is 'Beverly' and 'Benedict.' W is for 'Willy Wonka,' 'why,' and 'wasted.'" (In total, 20 of the 26 letters will be on view.)

The show opens April 20, a Thursday; on Friday and Saturday, Mesler will on hand from 12 noon to 5 p.m. to paint portraits for £200 (about \$280) a pop. He first began offering these on-the-spot commissions at NADA Miami Beach last December, he said, after selling all three of his paintings, which he presented in his own booth. "I can't believe I have to sit here for another three or four days," he thought to himself. "What am I going to do? More days of this really intense psychological warfare for me. . ." Publicist Adam Abdalla suggested that he paint people, so he went to the art-supply store, set up shop, and began to do a brisk business. "Wow, this just paid for my booth, essentially!" he said.

Almost all of his sitters were friends, but one patron was a man who commissioned a portrait of his wife. "I was like, 'I've got to let you know, I don't know how to paint,'" Mesler said. " 'This is kind of a schtick.' " (With people who know him, Mesler said, "I feel like there's this unspoken wink-wink, ha-ha.") He did his best, but when the woman saw the portrait, "she just gave a look of disgust," he said, adding that the husband was more positive. "But I think he was trying to be nice."

Seeing his London plans through the eyes of a dealer, Mesler noted that the alphabet pieces (\$12,000 apiece) are considerably more expensive than the commissions, but he was able to explain the discrepancy. "The paintings in the show are literally little pieces of me that I've spent so much time on, realizing and uncovering," he said. "The portraits are little pieces of the people I'm painting, where I'm almost trying to be this vehicle for whoever is actually getting painted. That's why I wanted to keep the prices low, so pretty much anyone could walk in and get a painting."

"It's you," he said, "and you deserve not to overpay to have you, you know?"

Dafoe, Taylor, "Talk About Vertical Integration! At NADA Miami, Joel Mesler Will Be the Dealer, the Artist, the Art Handler, and the PR Agent," *Artnet.com*, December 4, 2017



## Talk About Vertical Integration! At NADA Miami, Joel Mesler Will Be the Dealer, the Artist, the Art Handler, and the PR Agent

"Am I as successful as someone else with their staff of eight?" Joel Mesler asks. "Probably not. But do I give a shit? Not at all."

Taylor Dafoe | December 4, 2017



Joel Mesler in *The Dry Years*. Courtesy of Rental Gallery.

When Joel Mesler received a call from a reporter recently, he was on the street near his gallery in East Hampton, and had just had a strange run-in.

"I think I just saw Matt Lauer," he said. "I was walking to get coffee. He was in a Jeep, and he stopped and waved me by. I should have let him hit me—imagine that story: 'Matt Lauer Hits Art Dealer, Breaks His Legs Before Miami.'"

This, of course, is typical Mesler. Talking to a reporter for a story is not enough for the Rental Gallery art dealer—he also wants to generate spectacular news and then shape the crafting of the story, playing all angles of the game.

A similar dynamic will be in effect this week at NADA Miami, where Mesler will not only helm a booth in the art fair's "Projects" section, he will also be the sole artist on display, showing a recent assortment of his deadpan-humorous paintings. What's more, the dealer will also serve as the art handler, the registrar, and the gallery assistant. Most galleries—even small ones—bring with them a staff of at least four people; Rental Gallery will have one.

In an era when galleries are suffering from diminished sales and rising rents, such low overhead might make Mesler an object of envy among his dealer peers.

"This is my first fair since reopening Rental out here in East Hampton, and the whole idea is to be a different type of gallery again, to move away from the type of galleries I had in New York," says Mesler, who also co-founded UNTITLED Gallery with Carol Cohen in 2010 before merging with the dealer Zach Feuer in 2015. (Mesler started Rental Gallery as an exhibition project in Los Angeles in 2004 before moving it to New York.)

"I can do it myself. Why do I need to do something a certain way just because other people do? I'm 43 years old, I have no ego, I have no shame anymore. Am I as successful as someone else with their staff of eight? Probably not, but do I give a shit? Not at all."

Dafoe, Taylor, "Talk About Vertical Integration! At NADA Miami, Joel Mesler Will Be the Dealer, the Artist, the Art Handler, and the PR Agent," *Artnet.com*, December 4, 2017



Joel Mesler, *Untitled (A)*, (2017). Pigment on linen, 70 x 50 in. Courtesy of Rental Gallery.



Joel Mesler, *Untitled (D)*, (2017). Pigment on linen, 70 x 50 in. Courtesy of Rental Gallery.

Mesler will be showing selections from two new bodies of work at NADA. The first is a series of 50-by-70-inch pigment-on-linen paintings based on drawings, which will be stacked in a corner of the booth. The second is a handful of paintings from a new series based on the alphabet, in which he devotes each painting to a single letter, drawing upon memories from his childhood in Los Angeles and riffing on visual and linguistic connections to names of streets or schools in his hometown. In Miami, he'll be showing *B*, *C*, and *D*. He also has a show at Harper Gallery in January, where he'll show *F*, *G*, *H*, *I*, and *J*. (*E* has already been sold.)

The paintings evoke illustrations from a children's alphabet book, but are underscored by Mesler's dark wit. They're backgrounded by a pattern of overlapping green leaves, based on the wallpaper at the Beverly Hills Hotel—a place that, for Mesler, holds powerful memories.

"It was the beginning of my parents' divorce," he says. "We had brunch at the Beverly Hills Hotel. My father threw the brunch table over; the eggs Benedict ran down the side of the table onto my mother's lap, and he had a nervous breakdown and ran through the streets of Beverly Hills."

"That was my point of arrested development," he said, half-jokingly. "That's when I stopped being a normal person, I think."

The play between sadness and dry humor is at the heart of Mesler's work, and it comes across vividly in a video 'ad' of sorts that he released last week to promote his NADA booth. Titled "The Dry Years," the video features the dealer drolly discussing his art, his alcoholism, and apologizing—as if on step 9 of an AA recovery program—for the time he snuck into a party at the Museum of Modern Art. (Earlier this year he also released a mordent, mockumentary-style video to announce his move to East Hampton.)

A video of an unshaven gallerist talking about his problems may not sound like the best calling card for someone whose art you might want to buy—and from whom you want to buy it. But for Mesler, it works.

"A print ad costs a certain amount of money, and I realized that I could spend less money and actually tell a story," he says. (Nevermind that for the same amount of money, he probably could have paid someone to help him man his NADA booth.)

"I've given myself color, I've given myself audio, and I've given myself a mini-narrative. I think I'm just going to keep doing them, kind of like chapters, letting people know what I'm doing," he says. In other words, stay tuned.

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## Watch the Hilarious Video That Art Dealer Joel Mesler Is Using to Debut His New East Hampton Gallery

The dealer and artist has created a gem of deadpan humor to announce his new Rental Gallery space.

Andrew Goldstein | May 16, 2017



The artist and dealer Joel Mesler outside his new East Hampton incarnation of Rental Gallery.

Oh, hello. I didn't see you there. I'm Andrew Goldstein, the editor of artnet News, and this is an article about a new video that the artist and dealer Joel Mesler just released to advertise his new Hamptons gallery. Why use a video to debut a new gallery? I'm glad you asked.

Let me tell you a secret. There's no reason to create a video to debut your new gallery. Unless... you are trying to create a viral sensation with something so funny, so deadpan, so I-can't-believe-he-did-that that it will endear you to your new well-heeled clientele and give Manhattanites a taste of what they're missing.

A former Los Angeles dealer who rose to prominence in New York through his championing of market-stars-to-be at the now-defunct spaces Rental Gallery and Untitled, Mesler most recently partnered with the gallerist Zach Feuer on two Lower East Side galleries—Mesler/Feuer and Feuer/Mesler—as well as a satellite space in Hudson, New York, called Retrospective. As an artist in his own right, Mesler recently showed his tongue-in-cheek, self-satirizing paintings at NADA Miami Beach.

Here, in this promotional video, watch the dealer amble about, paint, grow a beard, hug his children, and receive some beautifully thrown shade from Gagosian's Adam Cohen—an old friend of Mesler's—who manages to praise and skewer him at the same time.

Do yourself a favor and enjoy the laid-back music, too.

The new iteration of Rental Gallery will open in East Hampton this Memorial Day weekend with a group show featuring some of the artists Mesler has championed over the years, including Henry Taylor, Jon Rafman, Rashid Johnson, Ridley Howard, and Jonas Wood.