



Chloe West is a visual artist born in Cheyenne, WY currently living in St. Louis, MO. West earned her MFA from Washington University in St. Louis in 2017 and her BFA from the University of Wyoming in 2015. West's work has been exhibited in solo and group shows at No Place Gallery (Columbus, OH), Projects+Gallery (St. Louis, MO), Monaco (St. Louis, MO), Practise (Oak Park, IL), GCADD (Granite City, IL), and Millitzer Gallery (St. Louis, MO). West is the recipient of the Director's Fellowship at Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University (2017-18) and has been featured in *Booooooom*.

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Hi Chloe, can you tell us what is your background and how and when did you first start to paint?

I was born and raised in Cheyenne, Wyoming. My parents are both Ceramic artists, so I grew up immersed in the art world, making a lot of art and craft objects. I was always drawing and I started a sketchbook at a young age – my first life drawing class was when I was eight. I

began to paint more seriously in high school art classes. I spent a lot of time painting on the floor of my bedroom with a makeshift easel made from a stack of books. I took art classes and workshops at the local Community College during summer breaks. I went on to pursue an art degree from the University of Wyoming. I studied other art forms, but always returned to painting. This culminated in an MFA from Washington University in St. Louis in painting.

What is your process like? How do you begin a work?

Many of my works start in the sketchbook, but the process of my recent work has changed slightly. In the summer of 2020, I went home to Wyoming for a few months. This was during the early pandemic, and I wanted to get out of the city. Every day, I would go out walking on the High Plains near my home. The connection I felt to the landscape I grew up in exhilarated me. I started to collect objects I came across on these hikes: mostly animal bones. My family went on these long treks out to the uninhabited space of the prairie and foothills and would help me carry back huge loads of bones we found. I started to make images of myself with the bones, sometimes out in the landscape, captured through photography. The bones are very symbolic to me, they remind me of the beautiful and unforgiving aspects of the range.





What is the most important source of inspiration?

I am continually inspired by European art from the Medieval and Renaissance eras, especially Dutch and Flemish painting. My work is in dialogue with several tropes of the era, specifically *vanitas* painting and depictions of the nude figure. I work in oil painting methods I would describe as partially traditional, so the craft and history of oil painting is always galvanizing. I am engrossed by the history of representation, symbolism, and functions of the gaze as it relates to the human form. The histories responsible for rendering the female body visible are particularly fascinating to me.

Why your art is focused on the human body? Can you tell us why do you only paint some part of the body?

I am mesmerized with the figure as a subject. I drew and painted figures predominantly even as a child. There is an obsession with the body, collectively and individually. I am precisely aware of my subjectivity as a woman and as a queer person; my understandings of my body and how I move through the world are inexplicitly intertwined with the perception of my identity. I also studied dance, specifically

Ballet, from ages 4 to 23. This was a formative experience in how I understand my body and how it relates to space.

I deal with the figure in fragments because I am not necessarily creating narrative works which require a specific identifiable character. I paint myself, but I use my body to symbolize the Body, or the female-identifying body, in broader terms. Some works are more specific than others, but it is not always conceptually important to perceive the work as a self-portrait.

How does the city you are living and working influence you and the art you make?

The experience of being born and raised in Wyoming and then moving to St. Louis has been a fundamental exploration in my personality and art. Both places hold deep significance and play dominant roles in my paintings. My work questions the subjectivity of the body as it relates to place by displaying imagery from observations of the figure and objects found in the environments I occupy. The politics of looking and the relationship of the body to private and public space is at the forefront of my image-making process. When I moved to the city, I felt somewhat claustrophobic and highly aware of my access to public space. The work reflected an anxious interior showing views of the fragmented figure in relationship to mundane objects of the interior environment like windows and linoleum floor tiles, as well as cropped details suggesting the outdoor environment, such as leaves from a bush. After settling in St. Louis, returning home to Wyoming was powerful and opened me up to new ways of relating and connecting to the spaces I inhabit.

How do you see your practice developing in the future?

I'm currently working on larger works and I am excited about this shift in scale. I love to make works on a small scale, but the images are starting to demand more space. With these oft referenced "unprecedented times" I am aware of and accepting that the next path is not always readily apparent. I am open to the trails of thought these new works bring me to and how they might shift from the reference photo to the canvas.