

Salon Style: Painters Painting Painters at NOCCA

BY **MARJORIE RAWLE**

APRIL 14, 2017

Marjorie Rawle talks with a group of ten New Orleans-based artists who are painting portraits of each other one by one.



A PORTRAIT OF PATCH SOMERVILLE BY JEREMY JONES. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

Just from its title, *Painters Painting Painters*, ten New Orleans-based artists working in the same medium and on the same subject month in and month out, might sound like the perfect recipe for redundancy. As its name implies, the group—which consists of Kevin Brisco Jr., Aaron Collier, Natori Green, Peter Hoffman, Jeremy Jones, Erica Lambertson, Kaori Maeyama, Patch Somerville, Maddie Stratton, and John Isiah Walton—has tasked itself with creating painted portraits of each of its ten members. When I contacted a few of the artists, who currently have a show on view at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts’ Kirschman Artspace, Jones joked that the idea might be “a little absurd and even incestuous,” and Maeyama wondered what the future holds “after [they] finish painting each other to death.” But beyond its alliterative label and these light-hearted jests, *Painters Painting Painters* contains a diverse range of artists whose convening shows how crucial the simplest of connections can be in the search for a genuine celebration of individuality.

The idea for the collective arose last spring as Jones neared the completion of graduate school—where assignments, deadlines, and critiques often keep young artists connected and driven—yet *Painters Painting Painters* retains none of the rigor associated with higher education. For its structure, the group has a set of bare-bones stipulations: a meeting time (one Sunday per month where reference photos and sketches are made of one of the members and last month’s portraits are brought in for viewing), a modeling requirement (each painter must model once), a medium requirement (anything you can argue is a painting), and a size limit (a maximum of three feet for exhibition feasibility).



A PORTRAIT OF ERICA LAMBERTSON BY NATORI GREEN. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

Everything else about the group is only roughly, if at all, defined. For instance, each artist can produce as many portraits as desired of that month’s member-model after returning to the studio; one can choose whether or not to do a self-portrait after modeling; and the works can be as representational or as abstract as one wants. Hoffman commends this looseness of form:

“A strength of the project is the fact that we don’t share a common ‘style’ or even a belief in why we all make the work that we individually make. *Painters Painting Painters* is a group only in the sense that we’ve agreed to meet about once a month and to participate in the task of creating portraits of each other.”

This kind of flexibility is perhaps *the* strength of the project—and it’s telling that, after just a few months of working together and with only four members’ portraits painted, the group almost unanimously describes itself as a fellowship or a friendly meeting of minds more than anything else. There’s not complete freedom in their model, but perhaps there is just the right amount of structure to imbue a sense of dedication and attachment both to the project and to each other, and to create some incisive and individually beautiful portraits.



A PORTRAIT OF JEREMY JONES BY ERICA LAMBERTSON. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

The aim of most professional groups is usually some kind of career-advancing outcome. But with *Painters Painting Painters*, the goal is less professional and more personal, as one might expect from a collective revolving entirely around portrait painting. You won’t find agendas packed with networking, commissions, or exhibition opportunities—let alone any agenda at all—at their monthly meetings. Hoffman hones in on the significance of visiting each other’s homes and work spaces, letting him “see more of what each person does, literally where their work comes from,” which allows for a “better understanding of the artist and their work.”

Focused more on process—and people—over product, the idea to exhibit the portraits wasn’t even on the table when the group first assembled. The show at NOCCA was organized by member Maddie Stratton and contains a grouping of 21 portraits of the four painters who have modeled so far as well as a few personal works from all ten of the group’s members. Visitors get the chance to see Jones, Somerville, Lambertson, and Hoffman from not one, but three angles: as painters painting painters, as painters being painted, and as painters in their own practices. Eventually, though, portraits by and of all ten members will be on display together, giving an idea of what can happen when we’re sincerely interested in seeing, understanding, and honoring—whether through paint, conversation, or other simple actions—the people sitting right in front of us.



A PORTRAIT OF PETER HOFFMAN BY PATCH SOMERVILLE. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

EDITOR’S NOTE

“*Painters Painting Painters*” is on view through April 22, 2017, at the Kirschman Artspace at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (2800 Chartres Street).

CATEGORY: [Review](#)

RELATED: [Mutual Support](#)

[← NEWER](#)

[OLDER →](#)

ESSAY

INTERVIEW

Saving the Web: An Interview with Anna Perricci
CHARLIE TATUM

INTERVIEW

Watching the Sunset: An Interview with Deana Haggag
CAMERON SHAW

Finding Room to Grow
CHARLIE TATUM

WHAT WE DO Pelican Bomb builds the infrastructure to support local artists and connect people with their work.

[ART REVIEW](#)

[COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ART](#)

[EXHIBITIONS](#)

[CRITIC IN RESIDENCE](#)

GET INVOLVED Lend a hand. Write a review. Make a donation. There are multiple ways you can make an impact on contemporary art in New Orleans.

[GET INVOLVED!](#)

RECENT NEWS [Pelican Bomb launches a new partnership with NOLA.com and The Times-Picayune.](#)

Pelican Bomb is collaborating with NOLA Media Group to publish coverage of Prospect.4 on NOLA.com and in The Times-Picayune.

[Read more...](#)

[MORE NEWS](#)

STAY INFORMED Stay in the know by signing up for our weekly newsletter.

Your email address [SUBMIT](#)