

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

The Village Voice  
October 2013

## Home Is Where the Paint Is in Jonas Wood's Vivid Interiors

By R. C. Baker *Wednesday, Oct 9 2013*

Jonas Wood's new paintings present seemingly straightforward scenes—rooms devoid of people, a poker tournament on TV—that front for dazzling formal invention.

In some pieces Wood focuses on his childhood home, yet he offsets any sentimentality through the slow-burning ambiguity of his narratives. In *Yellow Front Hall* (2013), a black dog lies on colorful throw rugs; what might be needlepoint pictures of flowers and birds festoon the walls on either side of an arched window giving out onto leafy trees. At more than nine feet wide, the canvas invites the viewer in, and it would seem that the dog, gray-streaked and scrawny with age but content amid harmonious furnishings, would happily welcome your company. However, compositional subtleties add a layer of enigmatic tension to such homey scenes. One of those vivid pictures on the wall is reflected at a sharp angle in a heavily framed mirror, like a door swinging into an alternate reality. This abrupt diagonal calls attention to the shadows thrown in unexpected directions around the framed images, including upward. Is there some mysterious light source at the bottom of the stairwell descending off the edge of the canvas?

These disorienting perspectives oscillate between powerful graphic design and the physical realities Wood is portraying. In *Ovitz's Library* (2013), stairs race up the left side of the painting to meet a sharply receding wall of windows on the upper floor. A white ceiling enlivened by chevrons of light hovers over diagonal shelves crammed with vertical spines of books. Ranged throughout the lower half of the composition, these colorful stripes add to the impression of seeing the room at different angles, sometimes from the floor, sometimes as if elevated on one of the steps. Even without the celebrity name in the title, the geometries of wealth represented by the rows of lavish architecture books, contemporary art on the walls, and floating Calder mobile confirm that this is the abode of a mogul who has created an immersive cocoon of high-end culture.

Reminiscent of David Hockney's large-scale collages of Polaroid prints—Cubism constructed from the objective truth supposedly inherent to the camera lens—Wood takes multiple-angle photographs of his subjects and then cuts and pastes the images together into fractured studies, which he further refines through drawings and, in some cases, etchings. All figurative

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painters struggle with the impossibility of compressing three dimensions into two, but Wood's exploratory process allows him to replace the missing dimension—depth—with graphic drama achieved through abruptly juxtaposed patches of off-kilter color.



Jonas Wood, *Doyle* (2013). Courtesy the artist, Anton Kern Gallery, New York

In *Doyle* (2013), Wood appropriates a TV image in which blocky graphics representing a high-stakes pot and multiple hole cards are superimposed around a grizzled poker player. This plane of raw information contrasts with the incisive portrait; the choppy pink and gray flesh of the man's hand is reminiscent of Philip Guston's breakthrough cartoon paintings. But that master from the last century was constantly searching, scraping, and adjusting, brushing wet paint into smeary grounds until his characters seemed to coalesce out of the pigment like golems from the muck. Wood instead draws from his thorough preliminary studies for physical heft and

narrative thrust. Up close, the patchwork colors in *Doyle* give rise to consummate abstract interplays of smooth and rough texture; a few steps back, they fuse into a world-weary mug surveying stacks of yellow poker chips and wads of greenbacks.

Deceptively charming, Wood's sophisticated canvases straddle the diverging realities of our age—the space we physically inhabit and the multiple representations with which we both memorialize and replace it.

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