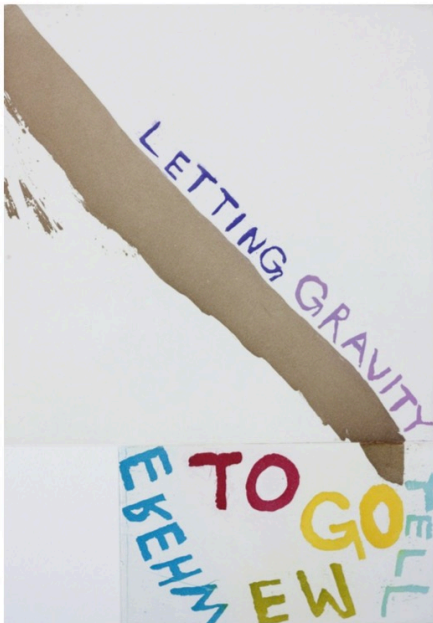


ART SY

'Mission School' Artist Chris Johanson Captures California's Singular Ethos

by Hannah Gregory
July 24, 2015

The lo-fi spirit of Chris Johanson's drawings, prints, and paintings comes from his formative years in the Californian skate and punk-rock scenes of the 1980s and '90s and the lively DIY culture that went with this. His latest series of limited-edition prints, released by San Francisco-based Paulson Bott Press, continues to emit the mellow aura and ground-up ethos of these origins.



Chris Johanson, *Letting Gravity Tell Me Where To Go*, 2014, Paulson Bott Press

Johanson began making zines, painting skateboards, and designing concert posters amongst the street, graffiti, and folk art aesthetic of this period in San Francisco, which came to be known as the Mission School, a name coined by critic Glen Helfand, though in actuality refers to artists in the wider Northern California region. Johanson's naive hand, relentless use of color, and sourcing of the wood on which he paints (he never uses canvas) from scrapyards or the street, align him with the sprawling movement's ideology.

In this new crop of aquatint prints—an intaglio color etching technique to produce varying tones on Somerset white paper—paint letters falling into one another in precarious relations. In *Letting Gravity Tell Me Where To Go* (2014) words mirror the force's downward pull, a slide of childish letters faced with grown-up concerns. In *From Here To Here With What Happens Between* (2014), a mottled color wash cushions the poetic letters: the prints' mottos could be read like titles to Miranda July short stories.

They resonate West Coast warmth, while their letters, shapes, and figures remain a little rough around the edges. Johanson's style has been described as "abstract positivity," and though they emit good vibes, it's not all sunshine. *New York Times* art critic Ken Johnson notes that Johanson and his peers were born "during or just after the euphoric peak of the hippie counterculture and at the start of a darker, less hopeful time."



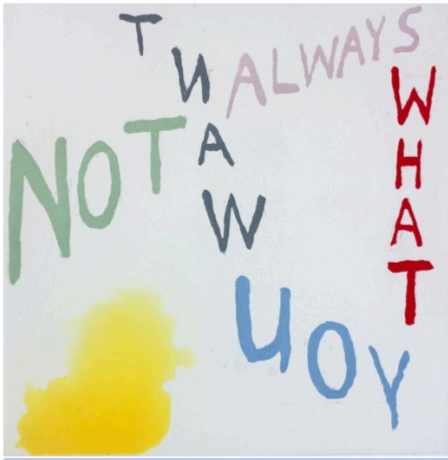
Chris Johanson, *From Here To Here With What Happens Between*, 2014, Paulson Bott Press

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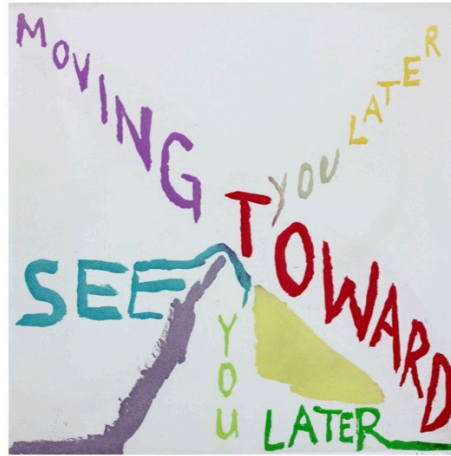
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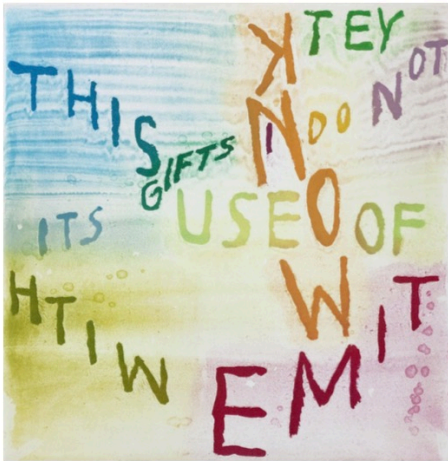
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Chris Johanson, *Not Always What You Want*, 2014
Paulson Bott Press



Chris Johanson, *Moving Toward/See You Later*, 2014
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Chris Johanson, *This Use Of Time With Its Gifts I Do Not Yet Know*, 2014, Paulson Bott Press



Chris Johanson, *Being In My Life*, 2014, Paulson Bott Press

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Chris Johanson, *Abstract Art With Cosmic Narrative*, 2014, Paulson Bott Press

It's as though Johanson wants to believe in the positive energy his paintings are charged with, but is caught between the will to retain a state of youthful wonder and the need for a critical eye on humanity. *Being In My Life* (2014) makes a comment on the self-absorption of modern life, with a book on the shelf titled *Selfish Living*. In *Abstract Art With Cosmic Narrative* (2014) the unknown of a textured black sky borders a sea whose geometric blocks of blue recall the pureness of color and form in Etel Adnan's watercolors—where vibrancy contains philosophical depth. Johanson's work continues to be free-spirited and brave at heart.

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<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-mission-school-artist-chris-johanson-captures-california-s>