

"Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it."

Michelangelo

An idyllic state of mind. A clean and beautiful place, perhaps in the country, in a meadow, under an ancient tree, sitting with one's thoughts, free and ponderous. The insight of thought existing separate from day to day consciousness, the forced multitasking of our lives, jobs, entertainment, relationships and interactions, breathing, hearts beating, blood flowing, neurons firing along pathways throughout a system made up of a collection of cells and water. All mind, no mind. A mind not fixed or occupied by thought or emotion and thus open to everything. On a Clear Day is the poetic painted expression of this concept and the setting for a hero's journey.

As a theoretical physics addict I find it impossible to look at works like *On a Clear Day*, *Atlantis*, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, *Lighthouse*, *Four White Leopards*, *Land's End*, and especially *Inner Sanctuary*, without leaping into science fiction and what is becoming science fact. Just recently a group of physics Masters students at England's University of Leicester discovered that traveling at Warp Speed or engaging the fictional Hyperdrive of Star Wars one would not see elongated stars zooming past. Instead, one would see a centralized glow as the Doppler Effect would pull stars out of our visual spectrum, replaced with a new x-ray radiation light. The science fiction world has yet to compensate for numerous decades of incorrect assumptions on the visual aspects of space travel.

Luckily a painter need not worry about correction of this kind. One cannot be proven to paint incorrectly. Painting by its very nature is already truth, capable of reinterpretation, recreation, and re-imagination. He is free to play with light. Contributing skillfully to our understanding of the visible planes in painting, his pictures are constructed layer by layer with intense discussion and thought between himself and his assistants before and after each move is made. "Does this one get geometries?" he may ask us, referring to the dot patterns that feature in a number of paintings in this exhibition. Depending on our feelings about the compositional strength of the underlying ground and form of his early layers of calligraphy, we utter a "yes" or a "no". This depends largely on our taste and vision for his work. If he's not feeling it, not in agreement with our assessment, he'll take a painting down and lean it face into the wall. "Put a sticky note on this, it's

getting geometries.” Sometimes a finished painting only requires a vigorously colored ground with a calligraphic mark on top. Sometimes a painting needs many layers of resin on top of variously gilded precious metal leaves, above and below brush strokes, under layers of undulating dot patterns. *Lighthouse* and *Four White Leopards* play with this idea of space, what Gimblett calls “unders” and “overs”, that is, the complex articulation of different understandings and representations of space existing within the two dimensional plane of the surface of a painting.

It's this shifting of layers of light through resin, bounced off of precious metals, and scattered across the surface of the paintings that really sings to the symbolic representation of multiple dimensions of existence taking place concurrently. Material is content. Max's working definition for a symbol is something between the known and unknown. This qualifies all of his paintings as symbols.

The live action Jason versus Ray Harryhausen's stop motion skeletons scene from Jason and the Argonauts has played in my mind a few times since beginning my lifetime residency as Gimblett's assistant and not manager. I've hunted it down on Youtube and played it more than once when, with a shout of "The Golden Fleece!" during a titling session on the Bowery, I am reminded of the film's raw creative brilliance. Gimblett's sixty-inch quatrefoil lifts its title from the film and the painting depicts a clear battle between good and evil aided by the concept of dualism Gimblett often speaks about. The narrative mythology he draws power from never leaves his panels and canvases. *Jason and the Argonauts*, the painting, is itself a shield. The painting itself is a shield and the symbol for a shield and what a shield represents - protection, strength, beauty. Its dominant white ground hints at it being Jason's shield but the aggressive swipes of the war colors of red and black combine with the golden luxury of the demon gracing one of the skeletons' shields, to maintain the push, pull, and mystery of the unknown. The alchemist's role is not to choose sides but to observe, acquire knowledge and experience. To employ them to their fullest. This is the responsibility of the artist.

A fireman friend of mine once told me I should never let the truth get in the way of a good story. I've heard more than one person say that if we repeat a story enough times it becomes the truth regardless of what actually happened. Gimblett is a master storyteller. He spun out a memory of his time at Bellagio, Lake Como, Italy, at the Rockefeller Foundation. The Assistant Director of the Foundation would visit him in the morning and

bring with her a different exotic dead Italian butterfly as a gift. She did this a few times and Max would draw these butterflies and make watercolors inspired by them. He sold a few to other residents of the Foundation. One day the Assistant Director said she was going to visit her husband's grave. He had died within the previous year. Max asked if he could join her on the walk. For as long as I've known him he's been fascinated by death, karma, and rebirth. Standing at the gravesite 10,000 white butterflies appear and circle them.

When Max tells this story his eyes expand beyond his lids. It's clear that this story has intense symbolic meaning for him. The butterflies, Max says, were the Assistant Director's dead husband. They could be any number of spirits commonly found in graveyards in the area. The butterflies in the story remind me of the Kodama, forest spirits of ancient Japanese folklore, watchers over something of great power, importance, and spiritual value. The large number of butterflies, ten thousand, offer perhaps another layer of meaning present in his use of warped and shifted geometric forms. They can also be the famous ten thousand things of Buddhism, that is, everything else in the universe.

From personal stories to more well known cultural mythology, the narrative impulse continues through to *Dionysus*, *Atlantis*, and *The Lords of the Earth*. As Gimblett pays homage to these heroes and lands mythological in origin he, too, gives his respect and gratitude to those who his artistic lineage is derived from. He pays particular attention to an Early Italian Renaissance painter (*Ascension After Fra Angelico*), a 20th Century American (*Land's End - After Jasper Johns*), and a 20th Century New Zealander (*Homage to Colin McCahon*). The relationship between his work and all the work that has come before his, is strong. Lineage is of vital importance to Max. He's told me about how he values the mentors he's encountered in his lifetime and how grateful he is to have them in his life. "A teacher need not be living and you don't have to have ever met them. Many of my mentors teach me with their art and with their books". Heroes of Max's like Picasso, Hemmingway, and his very dear and beloved Len Lye, have pushed Max to be the painter he is today. Their example and shared experience has laid the foundation for a practice spanning five decades without a hint of slowing down.

The most important metaphor presented in the works in *On a Clear Day* is that of the mythical Jason. Leaving his home, and everything he's known, he quests for the Golden Fleece, so that when he returns he will take his

rightful place as king. This is the quest of every painter. Each day we leave the comfort of a conventional life, of the normal day to day, and we spend hours talking about and working with ideas and feelings. We perform tremendous creative physical acts while searching for that, which will permit us to take our rightful place as Kings. Max has left the safety of home countless times and always returns, fleece in hand, prepared to rule justly and with great passion. He wakes up every morning looking forward to doing it all over again.

Matt Jones
Artist
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Matt Jones (born 1980, Rochester, New York) is an artist living and working in Brooklyn, NY. Jones received his BFA from The Cooper Union, was awarded the Vera T. Carroll Prize for Painting, and attended the Yale Norfolk Summer School of Painting.

Jones works between a variety of inter-related genres that explore astronomy, theoretical physics, ancient history, the occult, and comedy – all developed and inspired by research and personal experience. Together his bodies of work form a way for Jones to interact with, evaluate, negotiate, and play with the world around him.

Jones has exhibited at a number of prominent galleries and institutions including the Morris Museum, Mass MoCA, NADA Art Fair, The Hole, Freight and Volume, and Anonymous Gallery. Jones's work has been reviewed in Purple Diary, I-D, and NY Arts Magazine, Art Net, The New Yorker, The New York Times, and Paper Magazine to name a few. Jones continues to work with The Hole (New York) and Anonymous Gallery (Mexico City).

He has worked with Max Gimblett for twelve years.