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Up and Coming: Ceramist Jesse Wine on Making Art Accessible

Rob Sharp

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Portrait of Jesse Wine by Kate Berry for Artsy.

Elephant and Castle is one of South London's most diverse districts. A bustling pocket of Latin American, West African, and Central Asian cultures, among many others, it is now the site of a long-awaited £3 billion regeneration project that makes recent protests in East London over gentrification seem marginal and obsolete.

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County Street, a short walk from “the Elephant,” as it is known in the capital, is a quiet enclave within that melee, a thoroughfare of terraces and lockups, some of which are used as project spaces, workshops, and studios. A replica of Trafalgar Square’s Fourth Plinth — Stephen Hall’s work for the street’s Cul De Sac Gallery — nestles at the road’s terminus. Skip next door to that gallery’s neighbor, and you’ll witness yet another iteration of the area’s varied makeup.



Photo by Kate Berry for Artsy.

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Jesse Wine
Cool definition II, 2015
Mary Mary



Jesse Wine
Cool definition I, 2015
Mary Mary



Jesse Wine
Djokovic vs Federer, 2015
Limoncello

The workspace of up-and-coming ceramist Jesse Wine houses a towering, multi-faceted sculpture for Frieze London when I catch him a couple weeks ahead of the fair. In addition to this piece, earmarked for Frieze's Sculpture Park, Wine is preparing a solo presentation for his London gallery Limoncello – part of Focus, a section dedicated to emerging galleries – and will also have work on view with Glasgow representative Mary Mary. Engaging and gregarious, Wine enthusiastically elaborates on the Sculpture Park project's genesis: a reimagining of habitual collections of dried fruit from his father's kitchen sideboard.

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“He would stack fruit in these little piles and me and my brother would do it with him,” says 31-year-old Wine when we speak. (He’ll turn 32 mid-way through Frieze’s run.) “It was like playing, in a way. It was my first legitimate experience of something you might call art—taking an inexplicable, really idiosyncratic approach to something that is in some way familiar. So much of it informs the way I work now, but it’s taken me forever to figure that out.”

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Wine's work often mimetically explores his own life, whether his childhood in Chester (a small city in northwest England) or in his glazed interpretations of the clothing he wears, the way he sits, or the output of the artists he admires. He has won plaudits for his two solo shows at Limoncello and for his first institutional exhibition, "Young man red," at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead in 2014. There, he reinterpreted Alexander Calder's kinetic sculptures in the form of everyday objects like Reebok Classic trainers and the remnants of a discarded lunch. His 2014 show at Mary Mary, "Chester Man," alluded to the imposed permanence of ancient museum artifacts.



Jesse Wine
I can like anything, 2015
Limoncello

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“My work draws on being British and certain specific uses of language,” says Wine. The titles he chooses are but one example of his interest in the everyday. (Recent artworks have included *The whole vibe of everything* and *I can like anything* (both 2015).) “The idea for me is that if you are telling a story, there’s an opportunity with the text to describe something outside the art that completely informs the way the work is received.” He says this stems from wanting to “be as generous as possible with the work, to communicate with large audience. I want it to feel accessible to the everyman.”



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Born in 1983, Wine studied at Camberwell College of Arts, two miles south of “the Elephant,” and on the river at the Royal College of Art (RCA) for his Sculpture MA in Battersea. He encountered ceramics for the first time by accident, during an exchange program with New York’s Hunter College organized by the RCA. He explains in a 2014 interview with *Art Papers* that he had missed every “interesting” class due to a “bureaucratic fuck up” – and ended up taking “Clay and Casting” instead. “It taught me everything,” he says.



Photo by Kate Berry for Artsy.

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Fast forward to Wine's debut solo show at Limoncello in 2012, which threw critics a curve ball. A raised walkway reimagined the gallery as a Japanese Zen garden, the floor covered in gravel and Wine's immaculately finished objects — basket structures, slathered in glaze; other pieces round, humpy or hive-like. He already evinced an obsessive care in the craft of making, something he often describes in spiritual terms. "You are somehow reflecting your psychological and social position in life at any given moment," he says of his relationship with his material, though this sentiment informs everything he does. "I spend a large part of the day in a studio alone, which I love, don't get me wrong. But it is therapy."

If introspection is the key to his production process, then the BALTIC show saw Wine's gaze turn further inwards. In an accompanying video produced by the gallery for the show, the artist talks through the finishing touches to his 2014 self portrait *Young man red eating dinner* — a Calder-infused ceramic and steel mobile depicting Wine's studio workwear of red vest, cap, shorts, shoes, and mug of tea plus pasta dinner. The piece and others within its series appear as if a puppet version of the artist. And in the various iterations, Wine is seen eating, working, or choosing what to wear.

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Jesse Wine

Young man red in the studio, 2014

Limoncello

Earlier this year, Wine's Limoncello show saw the artist experiment with flat, painterly ceramics. Four works, assembled from around 40 tiles, hung on the gallery's walls, the pieces once again reflective of his own life. A section of his bedroom floor was depicted with household paints, while another piece saw him resurrect his favored studio mug, blended with a still life by Italian painter and printmaker Giorgio Morandi, one of his artistic heroes. "I thought I would actively approach it as if I was painting by giving myself things to paint, like flat surfaces," he says of the departure. "I was curious to see how it would operate. I had the idea that glaze could be superior to paint."

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Jesse Wine
Superdry I, 2015
Limoncello



Jesse Wine
Superdry II, 2015
Limoncello

Wine found his Elephant and Castle studio with friends from the RCA after graduating in 2010. As his own practice has grown in scale, his space has expanded, and his studio-mates have dwindled. Here he continues to run a project space, PLAZAPLAZA, though his own practice is currently in overdrive. When he first moved in, he says he and his friends ran a regular bar, a “speakeasy” with an open door policy, out of the studio space. That brings us full circle, to the creation of a new community—albeit one mainly within the confines of a specific creative class—that fed off, and legitimately added to, the teeming microcosm around it.

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“This area is one of the few genuinely successful culturally diverse places in central London,” says Wine. “It’s the old feeling of London before it became culturally flattened or deadened. [We had] a manifesto for what we wanted the place to be—open, in a way.” He credits the space and its constant turnover of artists and projects with some of his own current drive: “To have somewhere where people are finishing shows in your studio is really fucking helpful. It gets you in the habit of finishing things.” ■

Rob Sharp