



Robert Russell; Credit: Courtesy of the artist

MEET AN ARTIST MONDAY: ROBERT RUSSELL

 SHANA NYS DAMBROT × APRIL 22, 2019

Robert Russell's painting style is a kind of dreamy realism, wherein observation, experience, optical phenomenon and art history all blend into a seamless, fantastical critique of how we absorb and process information. Narratives that emerge resemble familiar reality — for, in fact, they are based upon it — and yet through the operations of pigment and perspective, Russell generates a version of the known that is both familiar and urgently strange. His new show explores the visual tropes of the artist monograph in large-scale works, and goes on view April 27 at [Anat Ebgi in Culver City](#).

L.A. WEEKLY: *When did you first know you were an artist?*

ROBERT RUSSELL: I was always making things even before I can remember speaking. That said, I didn't call myself an artist until I finally made a painting sometime in my late teens. Painting seemed to me at the time to be the threshold for entry into the status of Artist. I'm now ambivalent about the title and usually just call myself a painter. I still find making things more useful than speaking.

What is your short answer to people who ask what your work is about?

The shortest answer is that it's about being alive and announcing, "Hey, I exist." The slightly longer version is that I'm using painting to interrogate the way images and ideas are produced and consumed.



Robert Russell, Book Paintings; Credit: Courtesy Anat Ebgi Gallery

What would you be doing if you weren't an artist?

Making lots of money.

Did you go to art school? Why/why not?

Yes, I went to RISD as an undergraduate and then CalArts for grad school. In both cases, the reasons were to be around other artists/makers of things and to talk endlessly about those things we were all making.

Why do you live and work in L.A., and not elsewhere?

I grew up in Los Angeles and the place has a way of holding onto you like a parking boot. It's always being made and torn down, and you get to be a part of that when you live here. L.A. is on the brink. At any moment the plates underneath the ground will shift (as they have a few times in my life) and shake all the structures down. Or the water will just get shut off and the place will again be a desert. This is an ideal space to make stuff.



Robert Russell, Book Paintings; Credit: Courtesy Anat Ebgi Gallery

When was your first show?

1999 in Bergamot Station.

When is/was your current/most recent/next show?

My next/current show is opening at [Anat Ebgi Gallery on April 27](#).

What artist living or dead would you most like to show with?

[Henri Fantin-Latour](#).

Do you listen to music while you work? If so, what?

I usually listen to ambient Brian Eno or Harold Budd. Lately I've been listening to books on tape.

Website and social media handles, please!

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Instagram [@robertrussellworks](#)