



TOM PROCHASKA, *Shuffle*, Installation View. Froelick Gallery.

An Interview with Tom Prochaska

SHUFFLE

Froelick Gallery Registrar, Cathy Denning, interviews Tom Prochaska about his recent exhibition, Shuffle. In addition to discussing several of the works in detail, the conversation touches on everything from the significance of the exhibition's title and the materiality of paint to artistic influences, carnivals, masks, dance, and art history.



Left: TOM PROCHASKA, *Shuffle 1*, (2019). Oil on panel. 16 x 20 x 1 in. \$2,000.

Right: TOM PROCHASKA, *Shuffle 2*, (2019). Oil on panel. 16 x 20 x 1 in. Private Collection.

Note: This interview was conducted via Zoom on April 16, 2020. A slideshow of images accompanied the conversation, similar to what you see here with a few exceptions. The art historical images we referenced are reproduced here as thumbnails. If you would like to see a larger image, please click on the work's title (in red) and follow the hyperlink.

Cathy Denning: Could you talk about the title of the show? Why this title?

Tom Prochaska: It's very curious. I think I told you there is a dance called the Shuffle from the early 1990s that I got really fascinated by. It started in Melbourne, Australia and it came to the United States and it kind of got commercialized. But it's a high energy dance, kind of an electronic club dance, that I really liked. If you want to check out the Shuffle dance music, search for Elvis remix Shuffle dance.

CD: And you also took a dance class around this time, right?

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TP: Yeah, and I take a dance class now. It's mainly improvisational dance, everything from rock and roll to funk. Uptown funk is one of our favorite ones. It's pretty aggressive and everybody's in a good sweat at the end of the class.

CD: You've also said the title refers to a miscellaneous combination of things.

TP: Yeah, the idea that it's a shuffle of things, like shuffling cards. When I was hanging the show, I thought it was the most diverse kind of imagery of any of my shows. I was little curious: how did this happen? Because usually people do bodies of work and it didn't feel like a body of work. But when it was up, it looked great, and a lot of people really liked it.

I named the first two paintings *Shuffle 1* and *Shuffle 2*. I like both of these paintings; they're both color connected. *Shuffle 1* is connected to a painting of people wearing masks from the 18th century. It has a rhinoceros and people in it, and a gallery up above, and they all have black masks on. It's a very curious painting. I have a postcard of the painting in my studio.



Left: Pietro Longhi, *Exhibition of a Rhinoceros at Venice*. Oil on canvas, c. 1751. The National Gallery, London, UK.
Right: Postcard in Tom Prochaska's studio. Reproduction of Longhi, *Exhibition of a Rhinoceros at Venice*, 1751.

CD: You're referring to [Pietro Longhi's oil painting, *Exhibition of a Rhinoceros at Venice* from 1751](#). Is this postcard something you've had in your studio this past year?

TP: No, I've had it in my studio for the last twenty years because it's such a weird painting. I thought it was a bunch of aristocrats looking at a rhino with its horn missing. And in the picture, there's a guy reaching out holding the horn of the rhino on the left side of the painting. Anything quirky like that, I'm going to grab onto it and pin it up on my wall.

CD: The subject of Longhi's painting refers to the exhibition of a captured rhinoceros from India, Clara the Rhino, shown at the Venetian Carnival in 1751.

TP: It was this Dutch guy who went out and captured a rhino and took it to festivals across Europe. The woman at the top [of the painting] with the black mask over her face, this is a special mask with a specific name, and you hold it in place with your teeth.

CD: Tom is referring to Moretta masks, a Venetian masquerade mask common among women in the 18th century, used to conceal the identity of the wearer.

TP: But, the effect of that postcard on me was the fact that I lived with it, and I never searched it, I never checked it out, but it

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was always, you know, you put a mask on somebody, and it adds mystery to that figure, ambiguity. It makes it more of an abstract piece. So often faces draw you in, and you can't get out of them, whereas you can move around in that painting. That's how it affected me.

CD: The figure on the left in *Shuffle 1* seems to be wearing some sort of mask. It isn't clear, but there are marks obscuring their face similar to that postcard you have.

TP: Yeah, and I don't know if I did it in on purpose.



TOM PROCHASKA, *Shuffle 2*, (2019). Oil on panel. 16 x 20 x 1 in. Private Collection.

CD: Going back to the title of the exhibition, *Shuffle*, the language created in these paintings through the brushstrokes and layered marks, kind of shuffles around in your mind's eye, almost like a Rorschach test. For instance, in *Shuffle 2*, two figures have appeared in the foreground in the leftmost corner of the painting, that before today I never noticed, but suddenly here they are.

TP: The left edge is a place where I usually find myself in the painting, and it's usually figures that are semi-in and semi-off so they create a psychology or a space outside the edge of the painting. I attribute that habit to James Ensor. He always works the edges with figures, and he's one of my favorite painters.

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TOM PROCHASKA, *Shuffle 1*, (2019). Oil on panel. 16 x 20 x 1 in. \$2,000.

CD: *Shuffle 1* not only shares the title of the exhibition, but it's also the only framed painting included in the show, which leads me to believe there may be something particularly significant about this painting. You mentioned that Pietro Longhi's painting in part inspired this work. What else about this painting is so special to you?

TP: Want to know a secret? There's another painting underneath it.

CD: Can you talk about the evolution of the piece? I understand this painting started out with a magician's cabinet in the center.

TP: This part of the painting, the left side, found itself fairly early into the painting, and a lot of times, because one is trying to orchestrate the whole painting abstractly so that it works together, one of the first things I did was put a cabinet in there, like a magic cabinet, which repeats itself in my work, almost like a wardrobe, there's another word for it. In Europe, they don't have closets but they have these cabinets, these wardrobes, that stand up against the wall. It was here, in the center of the painting. I was trying to give this figure a sense of being a magician and something was going to come out of the cabinet. And I painted and I painted and I painted, and I scraped and I painted, and about the third day of working on this painting, this figure made its first inclination

CD: Are you referring to the standing figure on the left?

TP: Yeah, and she came about in about two minutes, and then the whole idea of the cabinet was gone. But it was necessary because of all the energy and the color of the paint around her. That had to be, I think.

CD: So, compositionally and energetically, the magic wardrobe helped make this figure appear?

TP: Yes. And it looks like she may have one leg. I don't know. I had the idea once of her holding a towel or a sheet between her hands.

CD: Yes, it looks like she is gesturing to something in the background. You can just barely make out the faint lines of a box that has been painted over, just to the right of her. She seems to be reaching out her hand and gesturing towards it, but it's not articulated.

TP: It's not articulated. It's suggested through the search of paint. I like this little yellow here in between the two [figures].



TOM PROCHASKA, *Wild Party*, (2019). Oil on board. 16 x 20 in. \$1,800

CD: Since we've just talked about the 1990s Shuffle dance move that in part inspired the title of the show, naturally I want to turn to your black and white painting called, *Wild Party*. There is a beautifully rendered structure on the right, almost like a gazebo, and several figures in the foreground and midground. The curved line of the architecture and this support beam, or door of some sort here on the right, is both beautiful and a really interesting compositional device. Action is implied both within and outside of the frame. Could you talk about what is going on here?

TP: It is a painting where everything is close to happening — it's a ritual almost. Everything feels like it's right on the edge of clarifying, but I left it because it's not clear. It contains possible energy and possible things happening. Like the figure that's inside of the box back there [the figure in the midground on the right edge]. The central figure in the midground, she was a woman to me. She's holding a hat up above her and she's dancing. And then there's the figure up here [top left], maybe an angel figure coming in on the left—see here, with the white hair and maybe wings.

CD: The very top left?

TP: The very top left, yeah. She's much bigger than everyone else in the painting, but she's kind of overlooking the party. These two people are actually a couple, maybe, and there's a devil figure here with horns.

CD: Where are the horns? At the bottom right?

TP: No, that's someone who fell down. [Laughs]. Here, on the right side about halfway up the painting is the doorway you mentioned, and just outside the doorway, is a very unclear form, and if you move up a little bit, there are horns—right next to the two people that are a couple together. I mean, it's all very ambiguous and concerned with energy and painterly quality more than it is with clarity. And it's probably one of the more energetic black and white paintings I've done. I've left it kind of rough and suggestive, but I like it very much.

CD: How did you achieve the texture in the upper third of the painting? I'm referring to the densely textured white cloud-like form.

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TP: For me, taking away is just as important as putting down paint, and in fact sometimes I discover more doing that. That's an area that I scraped, and when I scraped, I found some old red underneath.

CD: Did you scrape it with a palette knife?

TP: Yeah, palette knife. Sometimes, I use a razor holder when I want to scrape really hard, but that was a palette knife scrape. You know, I look at that and then I look at this little blue thing down here, see that blue thing? There's a little blue guy right there. That's another spot of color. The other thing I do is I very seldom clean my brushes between painting, between changing colors, unless I get to the point where I want bright white or black-black but I just kind of squeeze the paint off and go right into another color.

CD: Right, because you like the interplay and simultaneous presence of colors?

TP: Yeah, and I like being out of control a bit.

CD: This person who fell down—the “little blue guy in the bottom right”—kind of looks like a Kafkaesque figure as well.

TP: You know, it's a little frightening because it looks like somebody on fire, like a cinder person. I have no idea, but he or she holds the foreground down.



TOM PROCHASKA, *Small Boat*, (2019). Oil on board. 16 x 20 in. \$1,800

CD: This painting, *Small Boat*, evokes the changing colors at dusk, and reminds me of your comments during April's First Thursday broadcast, when you talked about the magic that happens when fishing on the river at dusk. In terms of the subject matter of this painting, there seems to be a figure standing upright in a boat, maybe they are fishing, maybe they are contemplating. A tree—or a tsunami of paint—is above and a bridge is in the background.

TP: [Laughs]. I love it that you can see all that stuff.

CD: Maybe it's there, maybe it's not.

TP: That one up there on the right, that's a tree. That's a fence, maybe, over here on the left. I got lucky with the color. It's another painting that started to be color, and through scraping and working it, I think I told you, this painting was completely

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upside down. The water was the sky. And I got really frustrated, and I thought, I have to do something. So, I turned the canvas upside down, and this became water, a river, and I made the boat and put her there. I think she is thinking about whether or not she wants to get in the boat because it's so small.

CD: I like hearing that you changed the orientation, and that it started out as a color painting. One reason why I really enjoy this painting is precisely because, from a distance, it looks like a painting that is primarily composed of black and silvers and grays and whites, and then when you come closer, you see there is actually a diverse range of color present in the image, from yellows, blues and reds to oranges, greens and pinks. The last time we spoke, you were talking about the ways you develop your colors, and you explained that sometimes you will make your own paints in order for multiple colors to be present at once. Is that relevant to this piece here? Can you elaborate on the ways you intend for the colors to, in your words, "streak into and tear across one another"?

TP: Any part of a painting, be it brush marks, size of brushes, I was thinking of it being like an orchestra with clarinets, big instruments, small instruments, drums. Painting is like the same thing—you're putting as many notes or as many voices into the painting, trying to get an orchestration, trying to get something that works and is wonderful in some way. There is an area to the right of her in the boat, looks almost like a figure, it has like seven or eight colors mixed in it. In terms of the thickness and thinness of paint, that happens easiest when the paint won't mix. If your paint is all the same instrument, it's all creamy and it just all runs together. But if some of the paint is thick and gooey, and if some of the paint is dried for a night, magic things happen because it's out of control a little bit.

I mean, what do you do when you make a painting. You have a space here, so what am I going to do, I'm going to put a tree over there to activate that space. It needed a big note in that section. But to me, painting is paint. If you experiment with paint and work with it for a while, you find out that a lot of it that comes out of the tube is all the same. There was a point when I was painting in the past when I just tried to make some of my own paint. I got my own oils and my own pigment from a German company in New York, and I started palette knifing it together, and some things happened that made me a little smarter, I think, as a painter. It expanded my experience.

This is amazing to concentrate on a piece of work I normally don't look at this intensely.

CD: This title, *Magic Stone*, is very curious and poetic. It seems to evoke various references, possibly to writing systems, prehistoric stone structures, folklore. Can you talk about the title *Magic Stone*?

TP: I can give it more meaning. You just gave it more meaning than it really had. There are two figures, and they have come to the magic stone, and maybe it's the magic stone in Scotland, which I've seen quite a bit. But there are two figures on the left-hand side and then the magic stone. If it holds drama, that's fine, but it wasn't intended to be anything other than a composition. And again, like in *Shuffle 1* when I tried to make a cabinet, here I made a magic stone.

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Left: TOM PROCHASKA, *Magic Stone*, (2019). Oil on board, 15 x 12 in. \$1,400
Right: TOM PROCHASKA, *Magic Stone*, Detail.

CD: What about the costume of the more dominant figure on the left? The figure has a very particular costume that seems reminiscent of the Pierrot figure ubiquitous in European art history, particularly in the late 19th century. Many of the artists you admire appropriate the image of Pierrot, for example James Ensor (1860–1949) and Georges Rouault (1871–1958). Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) also quoted this figure in one of his paintings (see images below).



Left: James Ensor, *Despair of Pierrot*, oil on canvas, 1892, Private Collection.
Center: James Ensor, *The Gamut of Love*, oil on canvas, 1921, Bonnefanten Museum Maastricht.
Right: James Ensor, *Pierrot and Skeleton in a Yellow Robe*, oil on canvas, 1893, Museum of Fine Arts Ghent.



Left: Georges Rouault, Pierrot Noir, plate from The Shooting Star Circus, 1935. MoMA, New York.
Right: Francisco de Goya, The Strolling Players, oil on tin plate, 1793. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Art historical footnote: In art history, Pierrot is a stock character from the commedia dell'arte, an early form of street theater popular throughout the 16th – 18th centuries in Western Europe. Traditionally, Pierrot—cast as a sad or naïve clown, or the artist's alter ego—is depicted in a loose-fitting blouse, usually white, with a ruffled collar and large buttons down the center of the blouse. He wears a hat or cap of some kind; sometimes the hat is a conical shape, like a dunce hat, but this is less common.

I can't help but make a connection to that type of iconography. Do you think Pierrot was an unconscious reference here? What do you think about that?

TP: Commedia dell'arte extends all the way into vaudeville in the United States. Of course, I love peasants, I love the ritual of costume, and I know the Pierrot figure. In fact, I have a Rouault on my wall that is a Pierrot. I understand the connection completely—the hats, the Pierrot, the Mardi Gras in Ensor's home town. Ensor's grandmother also ran a curio shop with shows and masks. It's the same house he lived in his whole life.

CD: Right, his family created papier-mâché masks that people wore during carnivals.

TP: Yeah, their carnival, similar to a Mardi Gras festival. Costumes, clowns, Pierrots, people with fez hats, I'm attracted to all of it, through its insanity to its ritual to its madness to its color.

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TOM PROCHASKA, *I Did*, (2019). Oil on panel, 20 x 16 in. Private Collection.

CD: We're looking at two paintings, *I Did* on the left, and *Magic Stone* on the right. The figures in these paintings have something in common. Can you talk about the central figure in *I Did*, particularly in light of your interest in James Ensor and the carnivalesque? Also, what is the significance of the title?

TP: I made a painting that looked a lot like an Ensor—I did! [Laughs]. There's an Ensor painting called *Tormentor* or something like that. And there is a central figure and all kinds of wild, crazy faces in the background.

CD: So, you're comparing the "wild, crazy faces in the background" of the Ensor painting to the faces in the background in your painting *I Did*?

TP: Yeah, and the painting, compositionally, is very close to the Ensor painting. It's one of his better-known paintings. [*I Did*] is so much of a connection to Ensor that, you know, I have to admit I did it. Not intentionally, but I did. There's a couple of paintings in this show that ring of Ensor.

Gosh, look at how that guy just loved to paint, it's just amazing.

To see a larger image, please click on the image caption and follow the links below.

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Left: James Ensor, [The Great Judge](#), oil on canvas, 1898, Private Collection.
Center: James Ensor, [The Intrigue](#), oil on canvas, 1890, Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp.
Right: James Ensor, [Old Lady with Masks](#), oil on canvas, 1889, Museum of Fine Arts Ghent.

CD: Your color paintings that feature figures are especially reminiscent of James Ensor. I wonder if you can elaborate more on that influence in terms of formal elements as well as in terms of subject matter.

TP: The carnival, the magic, the hats, the Mardi Gras. His grandmother ran a paper mâché mask shop, so it was always in his life. I think every artist connects themselves in a little bit with different people at different times of their life. Goya was a great compositionist, and I take some things from him. Phillip Guston is another person I really admire in terms of the quality of his paint, but Ensor has remained an obsession for me. Color, composition, quality of paint—that same kind of smearing of painting.

CD: And the gestural quality of his line seems to connect to your drawings and prints.

TP: He was a great printmaker, and there is a really, really interesting quality of line in his etchings that many people can't figure it out, and I can't figure out how he did it in his etchings. He lived in Ostend, Belgium. And I've been there three times, just to obsess on him.

CD: Is the store his grandmother owned still in existence?

TP: Yes. It doesn't sell anything; it's a museum. They let it get junky and strange, and it's still Ensor, it's where he lived. He never really liked to go anywhere else. He went to Paris once, and that's all.

CD: Does the museum contain his paintings as well as the items that were sold in the shop?

TP: Yes, and upstairs where he lived, there is a piano he liked to play. There are paintings on the wall. A lot of the work has ended up in the museum in Brussels, but there is some work and drawings in the area he lived in his grandmother's shop.

CD: While we are on the topic of Ensor, and since there are so many masks present in all of his paintings, does he also in part inspire your paper mâché sculptures?

TP: Absolutely, but mine aren't necessarily to be worn as masks.



Left: TOM PROCHASKA, *Black Nose*, 2019, paper mâché, 9 x 9 1/2 x 5 in. \$900
Right: TOM PROCHASKA, *Untitled*, 2020, paper mâché, 8 1/2 x 6 x 4 1/2 in. \$900

CD: What about *Black Nose* and *Untitled*? Do you consider them to be masks or sculptures?

TP: They are just wall pieces. They are sculptures.

CD: Right, they are a smaller scale; they aren't the same size as a human face.

TP: Paper mâché is kind of my fun world. These were made on balloons. Then, you pop the balloon, and you got half of a face or half of a head.



Left: TOM PROCHASKA, *St. Sebastian*, 2020, paper mâché, 18 1/2 x 6 x 6 in. Private Collection
Right: TOM PROCHASKA, *Usual Saint*, 2018, Graphite on laid paper, 11 x 8 1/2 in. Price on Request.

CD: Saint Sebastian is also a ubiquitous figure in the history of art, particularly in European art history, and has seen many rebirths over the years. As a footnote for the audience, St. Sebastian was an early Christian martyred during the persecution of Christians in ancient Rome. The story of St. Sebastian became a favorite subject of Early Renaissance painters. For instance, see [Andrea Mantegna, *Saint Sebastian of Vienna*, \(1459\)](#). Because he survived after being shot with multiple arrows, many in

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14th c. Europe believed St. Sebastian would protect against the Black Plague. Fast forward to the late 20th century, and you see St. Sebastian appropriated and eroticized by queer male artists, like filmmaker Derek Jarman (see Jarman's film *Sebastiane* from 1976).

What compelled you to represent St. Sebastian?

TP: I always wanted to do one. It's a repeated image you see throughout art history. I've probably made 60 or 70 of these figures, and they are fishermen, women, they are people in boats, people in chairs, but I've always wanted to do a St. Sebastian. This was my year to do one. So, I tied him to the post and put toothpicks in him. I don't think it's any more than a comment on the tradition of St. Sebastian. And he was actually an icon for the military and sportsmen too that I didn't realize. I knew the contemporary gay connection that was also connected to the AIDS crisis.

CD: Yes, in some instances, artists and activists appropriated the figure of St. Sebastian to make a connection between the AIDS crisis and other plagues throughout history.

TP: Maybe he fits for our present moment.

CD: Yes, this figure is indeed associated with global pandemics from the Black Plague to the AIDS crisis. Does the meaning of this work change in terms of what's going on right now with COVID-19?

TP: Sure, it does. It can reference the torment of physical change, of old age, of all those things. And the more I look at it, the more I talked about it with people, those possibilities came out, but the original intention was to make a St. Sebastian figure. And then, after I made him, Charles [Froelick] talked to me about him, and I started to find out more and more about his history, about how he had been re-birthed through different eras. A lot of that came afterwards. A lot of times you don't know what you're doing until you're finished. You don't know why until you're finished, you don't know the title until you're finished.

CD: You also have a drawing of St. Sebastian at *Disjecta* right now.

TP: Yes, they were parallel to each other, timewise.



TOM PROCHASKA, *Cowboy Bob*, 2019, paper mâché, 14 ½ x 16 x 5 in. Private Collection

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CD: Cowboy Bob is another figure that has recurred throughout your career across a handful of paintings and sculptures. Is Cowboy Bob a specific person, or is this just a random cowboy?

TP: Just a male cowboy Bob, just something to do with being a cowboy.

CD: Can you clarify about the materials used here? You're using the daily newspaper as well as wheat paste. Is the rope also made out of paper, or do you use additional materials to create the objects these figures often hold?

TP: The rope is hemp saturated with wheat paste. On certain figures that I've done before with a brush, the brush will shed the flour, so I may have put wood glue on the rope to let it harden. The most unusual thing about the sculptures is that they are all hollow. I don't use armatures of any kind to build them, so they dry out really well.

CD: Can you talk about the different finishes you put on *Cowboy Boy* and *St. Sebastian*?

TP: It was my aggressive attempt to make sure I was really getting a protective coating. That's a floor varnish on *St. Sebastian*. And for *Cowboy Bob*, it's Gamblin liquid wax, about six or seven coatings. I like the wax because it doesn't get shiny the way *St. Sebastian* did.

CD: Another thing I find really interesting about the paper mâché sculptures is that because of the materials you use — the daily newspaper — all of the sculptures are timestamped. Like for instance, *Cowboy Bob* contains fragments of headlines that speak to the Ebola virus. I can't help but think about the lion tamer that you're making now, and I wonder how many times the words "COVID-19" or "coronavirus" will find themselves on that sculpture.

TP: It's a nice idea, that the sculpture is documented by what's in the newspaper, but it's totally random.

CD: Right, it's just the material you happen to be using.

TP: Right, it's always curious though because people will get down close and try to read the text, and that's fine, that's okay with me, but it's not intentionally meaningful.

CD: I wonder if you will create a paper mâché figure holding a roll, or several rolls, of toilet paper.

TP: I will, absolutely. I will absolutely do that. [Laughs]

CD: It will be very collectible. [Laughs]

TP: Probably. It will mark an era at least.

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TOM PROCHASKA, *Raccoon in the Mirror*, (2020). Oil on canvas, 54 x 72 x 1 in. \$10,000

CD: This is the largest work in the show, and it seems to have the most complex composition, perhaps in part due to its scale. There is a striking mirror in the center of the composition that bears a reflection of a raccoon. I wonder if you can talk about your interest in representing things like mirrors or doors or windows, which is a recurring trope throughout your work. Is your interest purely compositional, or is there something about these types of liminal spaces that interest you?

TP: The first thing you said is really important because it's an ability to make rectangles and squares to lay out space, to make cabinets, to make bookshelves. And then if you extend it into doorways and mirrors, you're looking through the painting into other things. Like Ensor, you'll see Ensor take a window and there will be somebody looking in the window. A window leads into another world, another drama.

I did a painting when my mom died of a dressing table, a rug, then there's a doorway, a black doorway ([see *Open Door*, 2014](#)). And for me, it was a symbol of her moving into another world. Doorways lead into other worlds; they lead to surprises of people coming in. As a symbol, for me, a ladder was important—the ability to move vertically through a painting, or against the wall—but not so much anymore. But doorways have always been there. They all reference other worlds.

I'm also trying to solve the painting, compositionally. I'm trying to put together a solid painting compositionally, but not overly solid, that has some surprise in it. And there [in the foreground of *Raccoon in the Mirror*], there's the old habit—there's Pierrot sitting again, in the chair with his hat on.

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Left: TOM PROCHASKA, *Hammer* 2020. Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in. \$1,950
Right: TOM PROCHASKA, *Studio Blinds*, 2020. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in. \$1,800

CD: Talk about *Hammer* and *Studio Blinds*. These two are more quiet than the others. As still lifes of sorts, these are notably different than many of the other works in the show. Can you talk about what this departure represents for you?

TP: This whole show, I didn't feel like it was what one would consider a consistent body of work. A lot of things I just did in the show not because I was going to show them but just because I wanted to do things I had never done. Painting stripes, it wasn't the blinds, it was just painting black stripes on this tan moat of paint. And I thought I would give it a title that referenced something, and I called it my *Studio Blinds*, but it was just about black lines. And *Hammer* was the result of painting out. I kept eliminating things in that canvas, and I ended up with that shape up there and I decided to just leave it. Just to do something I hadn't done in a long, long time, to do something different. That's all. No more than that. They are about paint.

Like scraping, a lot of times the best activity for me is painting out, painting things out. A lot of that painting [*Hammer*] was the result of painting out, I was just trying to paint the canvas white again. That shape, I thought, oh Tom, just leave it, it's kind of fun. And it's a funny looking hammer, and it's coming from the top rather than the side.

CD: Do you have any final thoughts?

TP: Just an area that you covered is that my connection to Europe, Eastern Europe, to Ensor, and to European history is noteworthy. I'm a little closer to those connections rather than painting through American traditions. I'm also a little closer to Goya, to Max Beckman, and to Georges Rouault. Philip Guston is American but he's Jewish American, and his work is very much in a European tradition for me. Definitely Max Beckman, and New York artist Romare Bearden. There's an artist in the Disjecta show named Blair Saxon-Hill, whose work I like a lot, and it's very much like Romare Bearden's work.

CD: Thank you for the insight, Tom. This has been lovely.

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