

Restoration Hardware always had a reputation for furniture and design, but their addition of the division RH Contemporary Art in November 2013 quickly broadened the company's interests. Now, more than just having global showrooms that feature contemporary design decor, RH Contemporary Art boasts a six-floor Chelsea gallery alongside an online gallery, arts journal, and multiple artist residencies followed by exhibitions.

Earlier this month, the gallery opened four solo shows, featuring the international artists Tofer Chin, Koen Delaere, Paul Gillis, and Lucas Jardin. Jardin, the youngest artist in the selection, graduated from La Cambre ENSAV in Brussels earlier this year and then completed the RH-sponsored residency in New York. The Brussels-based, Roubaix, France-born artist draws inspiration from his environment, the idea of the readymade, and Nouveau réalisme, all of which blend together within his complex surfaces. His most recent works are now on view in the artist's first-ever solo show, "Fade In."

Jardin's work has been referred to as paintings and he uses the term himself, though his pieces are far from that. Beginning with an advertisement or large-scale poster that Jardin receives directly from printing companies, he then covers the surface with transparent solvents that chemically break apart colors, allowing him to recreate and distort the appearance. For example, a poster that was once adorned with black typeface deteriorates into a spectrum of purple and green hues. At the end of the process—after layers of solvents and rubbing, scratching, and manipulation of the surface—the viewer can no longer decipher what the image once was. His works speak to our contemporary culture and environment, highlighting and raising questions surrounding the influence of images and advertising.

Prior to the opening, Jardin walked us through the exhibition and spoke about his artistic practice.

EMILY MCDERMOTT: It's amazing you're just out of school and already here with a solo show in New York. Did you go to school for art?

LUCAS JARDIN: Yeah, painting—a lot of old paintings and very traditional techniques. I tried to make paintings and didn't like the limits in materials. So I decided to not work [with it]. Even in my first paintings, I would use turpentine or white spirits to erase some part of the face in portraits, so this idea of destruction of the material was present quite early.

MCDERMOTT: How did you first become interested in Nouveau réalisme?

JARDIN: In college I took a general art class and saw lots of shows in Paris in the Pompidou. I'm French, so the first work of art I saw was in France. This new realism is the first part of history that I saw.

MCDERMOTT: Why did Nouveau réalisme stick with you opposed to other movements?

JARDIN: Because it's a way to continue this experimentation that has been made in the beginning of the 20th century or in the '60s. We consider it French pop art. Also I love this idea to appropriate the pop culture and, not in a romantic way, but to be in contact with things that are made in society. Lots of Nouveau réalisme used colors from the super market—I was very attracted by the work of Jacques Villeglé and the different relations with the posters. Some [artists] put just the posters like a readymade; Villeglé is more like a proposition of something. François Dufrêne, he worked on the back of the image. It's always a different philosophical question and it's always the same support. We were born in cities, so you're attracted by the culture and your landscape. You can't paint just a landscape of a sunset. We live in the street with garbage, walls, taxis, and noise. It's all part of the landscape, so it's a reflection. I love to use my environment.

MCDERMOTT: Aside from using advertisements from today's age, how do you bring this historical influence into contemporary society?

JARDIN: I don't think it's a revolution. A lot of artists use trivial things, works of banalities. But maybe there are too many images, too much information, and this is a way to start. Not building new images, but to start with an image and find some solution with some classical gestural ideas of a painter, and how the body can fight with this image. I'm looking for the sensation of the images.

MCDERMOTT: How do you choose the images you start with?

JARDIN: I try to select by themes, like advertising posters. I've made a series on the pornographic image. I would love to make other series, like of families. For the advertising poster, I tried to not choose the colors. When I go to the company who gives me the posters, they are already rolled so I can't see the image. It's after, at the studio, that I discover all the different colors, different forms, different subjects, different graphics, information, words, and typography. After that the paintings start.

MCDERMOTT: You use the same technique for each work, but your surfaces all appear very different. Does the image you start with inform what you do on the surface?

JARDIN: Yeah, I'm very influenced by the image. It's like a dialogue with it, because I try to play, to give it some words. I try to install chaos in the image to create a space. Sometimes it doesn't work because I erased the chaos; sometimes a figure appears. I try also to make the image more tactile, make some distance from the object, and recreate the perspective of the space to decompose the object. And also, it's a work on color. The color palette is not my color palette. It's the color palette of the advertising, of the street, of the fashion.

MCDERMOTT: You could cover the images with paint instead of solvents. Why did you choose to not use paint?

JARDIN: Because I used lots of solvents before, even in oil paintings, to subtract things. I've also made a series on newspaper with markers and I painted on the newspaper to erase, to mask, some parts. I tried to find a way to paint inside the image—not an additive, but subtractive. Also [it's] to use new materials and new instruments; I use squeegees.

MCDERMOTT: What about the idea of working under constraints? Not having paint, but only using what's there.

JARDIN: It's to feel more free, to use an impossibility to make the work. [Using readymade images] is to feel more free. My works are to be limited, but also to be free. I've made a lot of works on impressions of Africa and there was this idea of machines. So you create a system and the system creates a new image, and the image a new word, and these words are things that inspire me.

MCDERMOTT: Where do you look outside of painting for inspiration?

JARDIN: Some sculpture and I'm most interested in cinema and real life—people, different landscapes. I have some friends who are artists and lots of friends who are not artists so that I'm not too much in the same world. But I love to go in the super market and in the street, to take lots of photos in the street of the graffiti, the censoring of the graffiti. But all things remind me of painting—the sculpture, cinema, and theater—all of it is connected.

MCDERMOTT: Would you ever use one of your photographs that you take on the street as the base for one of your works?

JARDIN: Maybe for a new series I will use my own photography, but I love this idea to use readymade images, images from pop culture. Sometimes when you take your own photo, it can become too aesthetic. Like, "Oh I can't erase this part because it's beautiful."

MCDERMOTT: What do you think of American pop art, Fluxus, and the other movements happening at the same time as *Nouveau réalisme*?

JARDIN: I think it's interesting. There is the movement and the artists are all very different. In *Nouveau réalisme* you have [Yves] Klein and he's a part of it, but also historians love to put a name on it [and] I think all careers are very different in the long run; over time you can see evolutions. An artist might be part of one movement, but then they change and become an expressionist or a cubist, and then they change again. But as for this period, I think the '20s and the '60s are very important.

I went to New York when I was 15, and I saw all the expressionists at the MoMA. It was stunning. I was also inspired by that movement of artists and the informal abstraction in France, and also in the North of France—I was maybe inspired by this kind of humor or sense of provocation, especially in the Francophone part of Belgium. The first piece I saw was from Jean Dubuffet, a painter in the North of France. He's inspired by Rembrandt and Cezanne, so I look often at another favorite movement, which is impressionism. I read lots of books on Cezanne, Picasso—those are my favorite major figures. In this residency, I've seen a lot of works. It's a fantastic time to discover a lot of pieces, because a lot of modern art is American. In this period in France, people didn't understand what it was.

MCDERMOTT: What's one of the first pieces of art or artists who you saw that made you interested in art?

JARDIN: I saw a Dubuffet when I was 10 or 12 in a museum in the North of France. It was a portrait, but lots of materiality with these two glasses and this figure. I was made very curious by the things that I didn't understand. It's the first thing that I saw in art and realized that it could be a job. I said, "I want to do that." After a while my parents were like, "Oh maybe do some publicity or marketing or advertising." And I said, "No. I don't want to." I wanted to study art or philosophy, not marketing.

MCDERMOTT: What's one of the biggest struggles you've faced as an artist?

JARDIN: I don't want to be ideological in my work. There is a critical part; it's ironic to me. It's subversive, or I hope it is, to critique this brainwashing of imagery and controlling of how to think, how to drink, how to be in life. It's like the standardization of life. I think you also fight with art history, but it's a strange paradox, because you say an artist has to be original, but that could be an academic thing. I think it's that we aren't so original, but can find a new solution with some repetition and things that have already been done. It's not a problem. You can use history. You can move to different movements—use a bit [of] conceptualism, expressionism, and post-modernism—and bring something to the mix. It's a subjective solution.

MCDERMOTT: How would you define your philosophy toward art?

JARDIN: I'm very inspired by the theory of Gilles Deleuze, the books *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Anti-Oedipus*, this idea of the territories. It's one of my favorite books. I'm very inspired by this philosophy, but I try to escape it because it can sometimes be dangerous. For me, it's very helpful to life, to make art, to be, to take some territories. It's like in poetry, you can become a flower or a street or the world. You can escape. It's also this idea in art and philosophy, the body without organs, to use different skins of reality.

MCDERMOTT: Can you talk about the ideas in *Anti-Oedipus* that influence you?

JARDIN: This idea of losing, a book on the question of desire, of wanting. I don't want just a dress; I want this dress in social context. It's a construction; it's a constructivism desire. I think I can apply this in different situations and also in art. It's the construction of things—you have some territories and desire and this idea to escape to different territories. You can be a part of your environment. It's also this idea to lose the face, the identity. That's why I use different images, to lose its identity, to give my own little personal taste. I want to be part of it.

MCDERMOTT: So would you say you're trying to remove these images from the context of today's society and bring in the elements of history?

JARDIN: Yes. It's a mix between the things that inspire me in reality and the context now, and also my interest in the history of art and the classical. I love the classical beauty, and the sublime. I believe in this. It's more maybe my romantic part, but maybe it's how artists think.

FADE IN IS ON VIEW AT RH CONTEMPORARY ART IN CHELSEA THROUGH MARCH 7, 2015.  
FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THE WEBSITE.