

Austin Lee: Digital Transference

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Whenever you're fiddling with your mobile devices, normally you're using it for entertainment, personal edification, or just to pass the time. However, technology is not just a means for absorbing information. It can be used as a tool for expression and creativity. In this era, you can conveniently transform your imagination into something tangible. The digital age is even influencing the art world. More and more artists are using new methods to create their masterpieces, like artist Austin Lee. He embraces and implements technology in his creations.



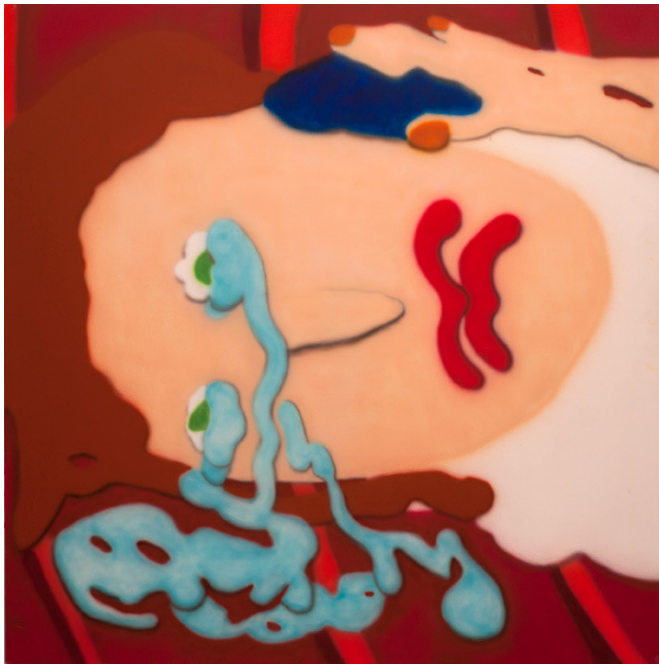
Since childhood, Lee has always been fond of developing art. In grade school he became passionate about art when he drew a simple sketch of a horse. His drawing caught the attention of his classmates, and their praise gave him the confidence to delve into art. As he grew older, his interest in art bloomed. As a graduate of the Tyler School of Art and the Yale MFA program, Lee is now well-versed in multiple styles of art including painting, sculpture and video art.

Shortly after graduating from the Yale School of Art, Lee appeared in creative director Ruy Sanchez Blanco's documentary, *Yes, but Less!* In the documentary, Lee described his creative process and the pivotal role technology plays in his artwork. "For me, technology is not just a part of painting, but it's also part of just the way we experience the world. It's just important to pay attention to the way people use technology, like even like the type of visual language that it creates. Like that's interesting to me, to see like how that shifts the way we start to see the world around us." Even when he's not creating art, Lee diligently studies tutorials on new technology. He is fascinated by technological nuances and constantly seeks ways to elevate his art.

Before working on a new piece, Lee, like many artists, creates sketches to serve as an initial guide. However, instead of drawing rough sketches on paper, Lee takes advantage of current technology. Many of Lee's works start as digital drawings on an iPad. While sketching and pre-planning are nothing groundbreaking, the use of technology is certainly innovative. In an interview with *Animal New York* magazine, Lee explained the advantages of using an iPad. "I made a sketch on my iPad and realized I could use a soft brush in photoshop to draw the blur of the moving hand. I decided I would translate the drawing into a painting and started working with my airbrush on canvas." The smooth and responsive interface expedites the entire creative process. As opposed to pencil and paper, he can quickly rectify mistakes, utilize apps for enhancements, and experi-

ment with textures, lines, shapes, and colors at will. With the motion of his hands, Lee produces visuals as if he were finger painting, except much more refined. This also allows him to freely work outside the boundaries of conventional brainstorming. Once he finishes his sketches, Lee recreates them on canvas by airbrushing with Flashe acrylic paint. The fluidity of airbrushing seamlessly mimics Lee's digital sketching. By perfecting a finished product beforehand, he can immediately transition to the canvas.

While viewing Lee's artwork, it felt as if I were stepping into a living hallucination. In his studio, there is a vast collection of bizarre caricatures and portraits. His works are cartoonish with a surrealistic slant. It's apparent that these are whimsical emanations of Lee's quirky imagination. Each piece is undeniably unique with a peculiar vibrancy. One piece, titled *Displaced*, depicts a man with a warped body posted high above a blank wall. The texture and placement of this figure create the illusion of a man floating and careening on a gust of wind. This piece is reminiscent of a carefree, serene dream you might have had as a child. It's simplistic, joyful, and somewhat nostalgic. Another piece, titled *Mr. Worry*, resembles a Simpsons character with a tinge of neon. Again, it's a tad simplistic but the bright colors and textures make it fresher and livelier.



Lee's ingenuity and optimism motivate him to keep evolving creatively. In an interview with LVL3 Gallery, a Chicago-based exhibition, he recalled a moment when one of his pieces wasn't well-received. "The best and worst reaction was the same instance. I had an artwork vandalized but I thought it was great because it proved that at least one person saw it [...] It was hard to even see the painting so I was surprised when I stopped by the gallery and noticed someone had written on the piece. I made a little sign letting people know that the words were added and put it next to it." As an artist, Lee has a novel knack for thinking outside the box. He is a unique individual and his artwork reflects that trait.

Overall, Lee's works are a bit odd, but they have a cheerful charm at the same time. Although his artwork may not be for everyone, his creativity can certainly be appreciated. In 2014, Lee had solo exhibitions in the Carl Kostyál Gallery in London and the Postmasters Gallery in New York. His success may very well prompt more artists to employ technological devices when planning their work. It will be interesting to see how Austin Lee's creativity progresses as technology advances.