

A creation myth on canvas: Paul Winker's paintings mix the divine and the minimal



Paul Winker's "Portal" is a 2020 acrylic-on-canvas work. (Kevin Todora)

How does an entire world come into existence? How does a normal person become a superhero? How does an athlete break a world record? How does an artist transform a blank canvas or a lump of clay? From creation myths to comic books, athletes to artists, the way we describe ourselves and the world around us is primarily through mythic origin stories.

These tales allow us to position some sort of framework around things that seem otherwise impossible, giving what is generally the result of incremental changes and dogged determination the appearance of happening as if by magic or divine ordinance.



Paul Winker's "Dyad" is a 2020 acrylic-on-canvas work. Winker begins each piece by making a quick outline in Photoshop before transferring it to a canvas and beginning to paint. (Kevin Todora)

The work of artist Paul Winker seeks to find a balance between these two extremes, marrying careful consideration and painterly process with electronically generated, ad hoc gestures. The resulting paintings are neither wholly abstract nor narrative but exist in a space in between; informed by pop culture, art history, creation myths and Winker's own upbringing.

Winker's first solo show, titled simply, "VII," is on view at Dallas' And Now gallery and features seven brightly colored, large-scale paintings loosely inspired by the biblical seven days of creation.

While the mythology largely serves as a formal structure for Winker's studies in shapes and color, the artist has long been fascinated by spiritual iconography. Raised in the sort of suburban Christianity that lacks any of the overtly mystical symbology that dominates more dogmatic practices, Winker found himself wanting for visual touchstones that carried the

full weight of their divine meanings. Yet he was simultaneously drawn to the democratic nature of more simplistic, open-ended imagery that allowed for contemplation without being didactic. “I’ve always liked the symbolism that’s ingrained in religious art, but its highly descriptive nature is almost to the point of being overwhelming. On the flip side, I’m drawn to working to reduce things down to the simplest form — a single color or shape,” he explains. “I’ve become interested in making work that fills this space. It hints at allegory and symbology like religious paintings and architecture, but at the same time is more descriptive and narrative than strict minimalism.” Winker developed his particular painting process several years ago while finishing up his undergraduate degree at the University of North Texas. He gives himself no more than a minute or two to draw in Photoshop by dragging his finger along the trackpad of his computer, the source of his jittery-edged lines and shapes.



Paul Winker's "Fount" is a 2020 acrylic-on-canvas work reminiscent of a pair of googly eyes. (Kevin Todora)

The digital image is then transferred to canvas, where it is painstakingly rendered in layer after layer of off-the-shelf house paint. Winker works with his canvases laid horizontally, causing him to stretch his arm to its full extent, the thickly coated layers needing upwards of 12 hours to dry in between applications. This methodology allows Winker to spend maximal

time embedded in the physical process of creation: the size of the canvas dictated by the length of his arms, the pools of paint the result of thoughtful brushstrokes laid one atop another.



Paul Winker's "Quarter" is a 2020 acrylic-on-canvas work. [\(Kevin Todora\)](#)

The paintings jump between playful, everyday references — Fount looks like a pair of googly eyes, and Quarter vaguely resembles a video game controller — and the art historical, ranging from the meditative washes of Mark Rothko and the hard-edged color

fields of Ellsworth Kelly to the earthworks of James Turrell and the bodily traces of Ana Mendieta.

But for all of their entanglements with myriad histories and mythologies, Winker's works are — at their essence — treatises on democracy and understanding. His uses of humble materials, human scale and informed but simplistic gestures are put forth as acts of generosity and communication. He wants his art to have the potential to speak to everyone. "VII" may be structured around the story of creation, but it's truly about an artist crafting his own iconography and origin story in the hope of giving to others.

--AVRAM, DANIELLE