



Maxwell Williams, "Peak Performance," *Cultured Mag*, Summer 2017

# PEAK PERFORMANCE

Los Angeles-based artist Andy Woll's in-demand mountain range paintings are driving his studio in one direction: up.

BY MAXWELL WILLIAMS

PORTRAIT BY NIK MASSEY

Growing up in Venice, Andy Woll could see the San Gabriel Mountains as he drove down Venice Boulevard toward Downtown Los Angeles; the summits and crests hazy and dramatic in the distance beyond the skyline. One of those peaks, Mount Wilson, became the main subject of Woll's practice—a sort of tangle between abstraction and Angeleno landscape that recalls painters like Mary Weatherford.

"It's a symbol around which I hang the painting," says Woll, who began focusing on Mount Wilson after first trying to paint the city lights from its vantage point, and then deciding to try it from the other direction. "I like abstraction; I like representation. I don't really feel the strongest division between those two things. If the painting was just the bottom two-thirds, it would be—I don't know. The representation part gives it a purpose."

The large paintings Woll has hung in his Boyle Heights studio as we speak are enormously

different. One is painted on a teal background and looks inviting as a skier's paradise; another black and commanding like Mordor in *The Lord of the Rings*. Each mountains' slopes are likewise treated with different swirls and lines of colors that play against the background. They are, says Woll, actually inspired in some part by the colors used on the covers of old sci-fi novels, which he collects for their aesthetic quality.

"I was thinking lasers, maybe oozy alien things," Woll explains. "There's an octopus with weird squiggling tentacles. I make them all in groups, and this group is a science fiction group, which has mostly to do with colors, and also to do with the oozy drippy-ness. There was a Western group, and that had more straight lines, and that was more carved wood looking—to me."

The Western paintings were the works he presented at Night Gallery last year. Together, the repetitive quality seems fanatic, a gallery full of one

subject matter—a single mountain—which is perhaps the way people looked at Paul Cézanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire series.

"Art History people are always like, 'Ah! You've remixed Cézanne,'" says Woll. "I probably have more unintentional similarity; we just both had an obsession with a mountain and wanted to paint it... To me, it's a very L.A. project about this city that I love very much."

Woll's latest obsession is painting office chairs with the similar repetitive nature and perspective shifts as his mountain paintings. He is working toward a two-person show in L.A. with fellow Angeleno painter Dashiell Manley in the fall, where he will probably show a mix of mountains, chairs and abstract paintings. He likes broad subjects that people can bring their own experiences to.

Or as he concludes so succinctly, "Everybody's used a chair. Mountains are everywhere."





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