



Waking Dreams

Already popular among collectors, young painter Grayson Chandler's work delivers the beholden to a 'foreign yet familiar' place. **By Chris Becker, photo by Jhane Hoang**

Painting, more than half it, isn't actually putting brush to paint," says 27-year-old Houston-born artist Grayson Chandler, who used to run cross-country, and believes there are many parallels between athleticism and creativity. "A lot of it is just sort of seeing, watching and looking. Like a basketball player dribbling a ball before they take a shot, or a golfer teeing up and getting their feet right. Before you dive

in, know where you're going to land." For Chandler, that means a new collection of mysterious, beautifully composed watercolor and gouache paintings titled *In Via*, which lands at Deborah Colton Gallery on July 16.

The show's title — "by way of" — is fitting, as the process in which Chandler arrives at his work will be revealed: Beginning June 4, in the weeks leading up to the show's opening, the public is invited to check out the artist at work in a makeshift studio located at the rear of >

> the gallery. It will remain in place through the run of the show.

This unique arrangement, titled “Artist Solo & Studio” or “Artist S&S,” is the first in a series of annual residencies at Deborah Colton, and is intended to give those interested in art a deeper understanding of the steps involved in its creation. Chandler, whose 2017 solo debut at Deborah Colton Gallery completely sold out, looks forward to engaging with the public and answering questions from visitors about his paintings, which have proved popular with collectors.

“The work has some narrative potency to it,” says Chandler. “It does have characters who play roles in order to guide your attention here and there and give it a sense of space. It really is like an environment.”

Those recurring “characters” include flower petals, butterflies, suspended vines and thin tree branches — recognizable shapes which seem to emerge like the remnants of a waking dream, and contribute to the “foreign, yet familiar” atmosphere of his art.

Nature is both a way in for the viewer and a point of inspiration for much of his work. But the ocular results are more like alien landscapes, or the blood, cells and guts of the body as seen through a microscope. While each painting is a visual feast for the eyes and imagination, Chandler is also creating a space for the viewer to experience an interior moment and meditate on the forms in a state of mindfulness, fully aware of and receiving without judgement whatever it is they are feeling.

“If you don’t ‘get it,’ that might trouble you,” says Chandler with a gentle matter-of-factness about what it might feel like for the viewer to look at one of his paintings. “But you also don’t *have* to get it. This doesn’t have a conclusion. You can come back to it at any moment, and it may or may not mean the same thing.” ■



Amped Up
Khruangbin's Speer,
Lee and, in the back,
Johnson on drums

TAKING FLIGHT

From the church organ to the world stage, Houston-grown rock trio Khruangbin takes the show on the road.

FOUNDED IN HOUSTON in 2010 by guitarist Mark Speer, bassist Laura Lee, and drummer Donald “DJ” Johnson, Khruangbin is a rock band Miles Davis would have loved to have played with, for space is the key to their interlocking, antiphonal ambience.

It’s (mostly) instrumental music you can listen to alone, or enjoy with a few thousand of your closest friends. At press time, Khruangbin is scheduled to play a packed show at 713 Music Hall in early May before heading out on tour across the U.S., Europe and, later this year, Australia and New Zealand.

The trio’s visual flair is as distinctive and exotic as its groove-centric music, and while Johnson admits his own fashion choices onstage have become bolder over the years, offstage, he prefers to keep things simple. “By nature, I try not to stand out or be seen,” says Johnson, who at 38 still seems surprised by the worldwide popularity of the band. “I much prefer to be on the sidelines, kind of out of the limelight. But life has a funny way of working itself out sometimes!”

While Johnson remains firmly rooted in Houston, Lee and Speer now live on the East and West Coasts,

respectively. But when it comes time to record, the three friends return to their studio barn in Burton, Texas, to track new material, before inviting other musicians to add their magic to the mix. Most recently, Khruangbin — whose name means “engine fly” in Thai — traveled to Houston to record two groovy EPs with Fort Worth-based soul man Leon Bridges. The trio also appears on legendary Chicago house DJ Ron Trent’s upcoming album, *WARM – What do the stars say to you*.

When not recording or on the road, Johnson enjoys the simple pleasures of playing basketball and returning to the church he grew up attending, where his grandfather was the pastor until 2001. Johnson’s uncle now oversees the congregation. “It’s really small,” says Johnson. “Family vibes. I play organ there.”

When asked how he handles Khruangbin’s formidable workload, which requires extended time away from home, Johnson’s answer is succinct. “I consider myself a person of faith,” says Johnson. “So, wherever I go, no matter what’s going on, things just kind of remain the same. I have that to keep me grounded.” —cs

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