



Up Close And Personal
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VOGUE



CONSTANT GARDENER
Belgian-born Harold Ancart, working in an outdoor studio in L.A. Photographed by Anton Corbijn. Sitings Editor: Phyllis Posnick.

Harold Ancart, a 36-year-old Belgian artist who lives in Brooklyn, has a show this month at the Menil Collection in Houston called “Road Trip.” It consists of 27 small works he made with oil stick on paper during a cross-country drive in his Jeep Grand Cherokee. The Jeep’s trunk was his studio—everynow and then, he would stop on the roadside “in the middle of nowhere,” get out, and make a painting.

Harold remembers being told at La Cambre, the Brussels art school he attended, that “painting is dead, sculpture is dead, everything is dead,” he says by phone from Los Angeles, where he’s spending the summer working in an outdoor garden studio. “You were supposed to do some sort of strange political, post-Conceptual work, and it was terrible. I thought, Wait a minute; this can’t be true. One of the reasons I came to the U.S. was because I thought people here would embrace things less with the brain and more with the chest.” Harold shows at Clearing, a Brussels gallery that has a branch in Brooklyn. His paintings, which can also be very large— mural-size—are vivid and utterly unpredictable. They play with scale in odd ways, and most of them have a jagged, tough beauty that subjects natural forms to unnatural dislocations. “People try to bring meaning into what they do,” he tells me. “The problem is that we’re surrounded by meaning, maybe even overwhelmed by meaning. I think it’s more interesting to remove meaning, because not everything needs a reason.”

He continues: “Straight-on painting is back in the spotlight, and so is sculpture. And we no longer make that silly separation between figurative and abstraction. Artists from the previous generation prepared the ground for us, and you have the feeling now that everything is possible again.”