



Photo by Steve Benisty.

ART

Artist Caleb Hahne, Just as He Is

By Katy Donoghue
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Caleb Hahne's “Just As I Am” exhibition is currently on view at **1969 Gallery in New York** through February 27, 2021. The show features new paintings alongside work from artists Hahne admires, including **Sara Anstis**, **Inka Essenhigh**, **Danny Ferrell**, **Chris Lloyd**, and **Claire Tabouret**.

Seemingly lit by a sunset or sunrise, Hahne has created images of horseback riding that sensorially capture the feeling of the American West. He's also debuted a new series of paintings of a water glasses, referencing the recent wildfires of California and Colorado, alluding to our current greater environmental crisis.

The Colorado-based artist shared with *Whitewall* what compelled him to explore his own identity in "Just As I Am," and how he's lately come into his own just where he is.



Caleb Hahne, "Together Conjunction," 2021, oil, acrylic, flashe, and wax on canvas; photo by Matt Carlson, courtesy of the artist and 1969 Gallery.

WHITEWALL: What was the starting point for “Just As I Am”?

CALEB HAHNE: “Just As I Am” came from a lyric in a song by La Lupe, a Cuban singer where halfway through the song she chants, “*Asi como soy!*” which loosely translates to, “Just as I am.” I'm half Latino, but very white passing and so this lyric has always felt like my credo. I've always had to be either, or, but identity is much more complicated than the binary as we see time and time again as the years go by. I am both of my parents and I am also my own being, "Just As I Am" or "*Asi Como Soy*" is a definition for me, someone who is not just one, but many.

WW: Did you explore any new techniques or material in the paintings on view?

CH: I did! I always want to try new things and push painting for myself and the viewer. I usually just do oil over acrylic, but these paintings included Flashe, pumice, and wax. The theme was a bit newer for me in the sense that I'm trying to be more unapologetic about who I am and know that being

mixed race is a conversation that I not only want to hear more about but also be a part of.



Photo by Steve Benisty.

WW: Why did you want to include the work of other artists you admire in the show and how were they and their works selected?

CH: My gallerist **Quang Bao** at 1969 proposed the idea of a conversation on the walls among artists and just asked, “Who do you like?” I selected artists whose work was also autobiographical. Danny Ferrell for example is an artist I've admired for a while who cares deeply about the people he paints. I find that the people we choose to love or surround ourselves with are reflections of who we think we are, who we hope to be or who we once were.

WW: What does the water glass represent for you in these new paintings?

CH: Well, the water paintings spawned out of my summer residency in Los Angeles. The fires were burning big and hot in both LA and Colorado (where I'm from), and it felt

necessary to talk about the things effecting both where I'm from and where I was at. Then upon further research I learned about how Colorado provides most of California with their drinking water and the water politics around that. The paintings in this exhibition are a continuation of those thoughts but I expand a bit more on the necessity of water for not only the land but our bodies.



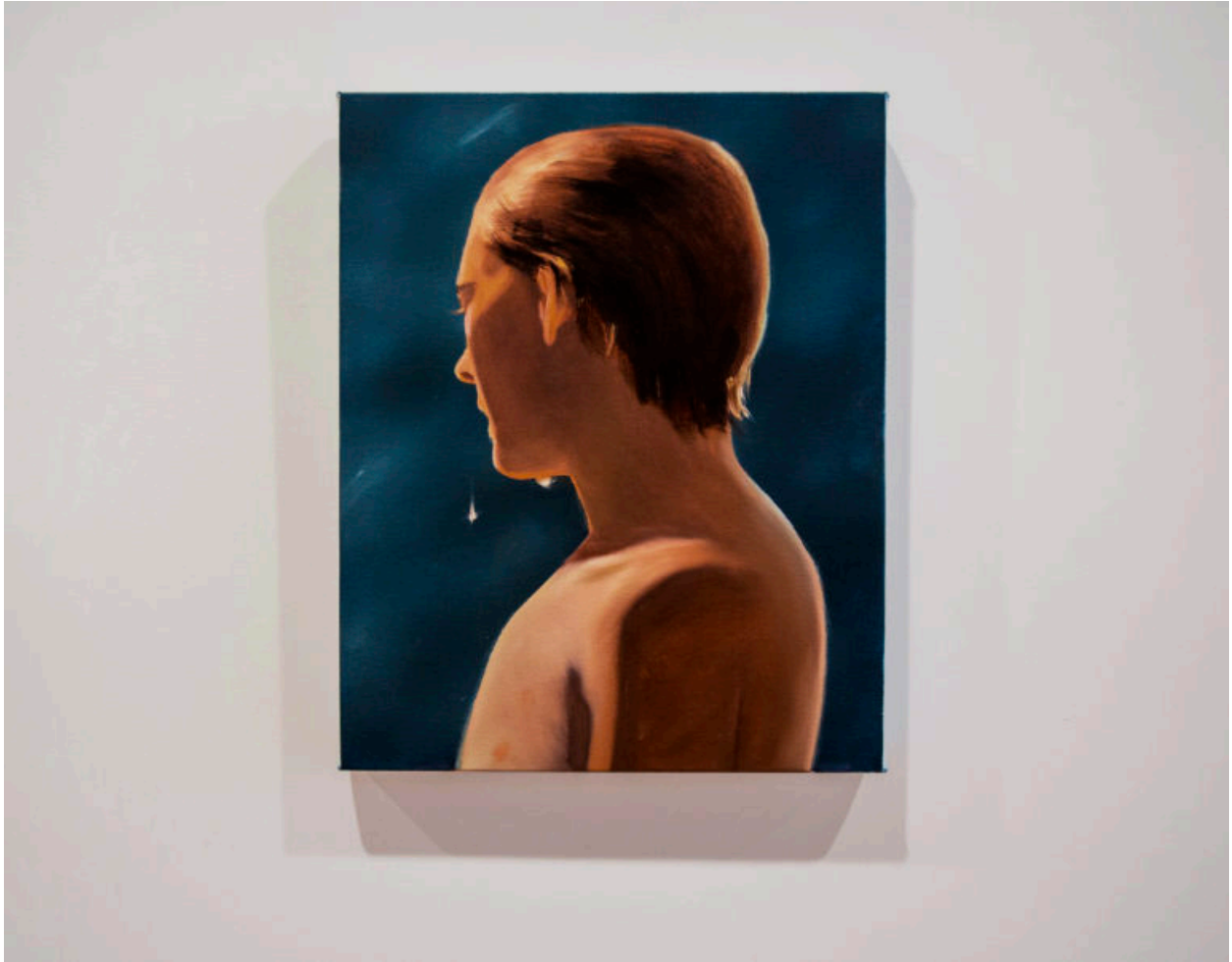
Caleb Hahne, "Feel Fill," 2020, oil, acrylic, flashe, and wax on canvas; photo by Matt Carlson, courtesy of the artist and 1969 Gallery.

WW: Can you tell us about your studio space? What is a typical day like for you there?

CH: My studio is in north Denver and I'm typically there five or six days a week. I'm an early riser, so when I get up, I make my matcha and go to the gym for about two hours. Once I'm done with that, I get to the studio around 10 am and will be there until about 6 pm. A lot of my paintings start from drawings, so I usually start the day making a few. I'm also one of those people that has to work on more than one painting at once, so I bounce around three or four paintings at a time. Sometimes I like to just go to my studio to watch boxing or read. It's a privilege to be able to have a sacred space where you disappear to for a while and for any reason.

WW: How does your environment and the natural landscape of Colorado influence your work?

CH: More lately than ever. When I was younger, I used to wish I was from a bigger and "cooler" city. Now as I'm older, I love knowing more about where I'm from and how special it is that this is the place my family chose to immigrate to when they arrived in America. Some of these paintings are odes to my ancestors.



Caleb Hahne, "The Day He Lost Fear," 2021, oil, acrylic, flashe, and wax on canvas; photo by Matt Carlson, courtesy of the artist and 1969 Gallery.

WW: Have the events of the past year change the way you work, or your source of inspiration?

CH: Yes and no. Like most artists, I think we are used to extended periods of solitude and so my life felt pretty regular at the beginning. But then I started to realize how much I truly love and crave relationships and small talk. There is no

currency for the type of energy exchange you have with someone in the physical; and since so much of my work is autobiographical and about all the moments in-between, I had to start digging deeper into my memory for stories and the fragments of my life that felt significant enough to paint.

**WW: How are you connecting with artists at this time?
How does that dialogue impact your practice?**

CH: Well, I think that our generation is at such an advantage because not only is it easy to see a ton of new art and artists, but it's equally as easy to message them or respond to an Instagram story. When there's a mutual follow among two artists, it feels like a cool club to be a part of or bond that is understood without being said, which I think opens the door a little easier to message one another and talk about each other's work or a shared love for an old Monet painting.

