
BEST EVER

Hailing from the South coast, Best Ever are a duo famed for their grotesquely beautiful photorealistic art. Formed from a desire to portray the macabre and drawn together by mutual respect for each other's work, Hadley and Neil have been working under the guise 'Best Ever' for around three years and thankfully show no signs of stopping. Their work displays integrity and unconventional charm but as they continue to expand their ideas and refine their execution, they believe there is still a long way to go before realising their true potential.

Neil began writing as a natural progression from skateboarding, learning the ropes from BUE (CBK) and eventually going on to join the infamous 54 crew. Those who have heard about the duo's wild tales won't be surprised to hear that "painting was just a by-product of everything else we did, none of us were interested in being the most 'up' or most 'hardcore'," remembers Neil. "I think all the train and bombing missions were more about the gag than anything else and in a way I guess we kind of wanted to upend the machismo of the graffiti scene, hence all the fancy dress and nudity!" But the lifestyle of these guys, including legends like Aroe, Jae, Slam, Hicks, Piro, Rat, Anie and Zadok was not without cost. It caused them a lot of personal grief and upset, while also excommunicating their fair share of girlfriends, wives, friends and family members. "Funny fucking time though," he recalls. Despite the madness, Neil's years with 54 crew allowed him to develop and begin working on the honed photorealism style we now see in Best Ever's work; it also taught him not to take the whole graffiti world too seriously.

Before joining forces with Hadley, Neil was predominantly working on his photorealism technique, trying to get it as accurate and true-to-life as possible without adding too many stylistic touches.

"I remember liking the idea that photorealism was in its way kind of 'anti-style' in that you forego any personal interpretation in favour of faithful replication of something. Of course that notion doesn't really have much longevity and I soon found that painting was becoming less and less pleasurable." Then, out of the nowhere, appeared Hadley, astride a gleaming white horse of free-thinking, wielding a sword of interpretive style, ready to do beautiful battle with Neil's perfected draughtsmanship. "When I started working with Hadley it was like a breath of fresh air," he recalls. "Because it allowed me to combine the discipline of faithful photorealism that I loved with something much freer."

Their pieces then began to take on surgical and anatomical characteristics. Though, unsurprisingly, the root of their visceral, dismembered creations stems from a dark place. Hadley's desire to warp the body came from seeing his father unwell. "The strongest person in my eyes turned into the weakest thing in the world. This completely changed my way of seeing things – I looked at everyone with an anatomical eye. I also started looking at nature in a more mathematical way; everything started to become a mathematical equation." The pair wanted to explore beyond the veneer of perfection and reflect human nature in its truest form, as opposed to representing the pleasing aesthetic of conventional beauty. Challenging the ease with which we consume glossy images that satisfy the eye, their work has that tinge of uncomfortable allure that comes with finding artistry in decay. Focusing on the shapes, angles and contours found in the anatomy of humans and animals, they are not ones to copy images directly but instead interpret and mould varied elements together to form a unique representation of our natural makeup. Painting the things that you don't see but know are there; different angles, bones, blood and cells; the fallibility of the human form can be seen in the movement of many of their pieces. "I think those kind of transient forms are intended to signify the slow yet steady decomposition of our bodies... Jesus, we need to open the curtains in the studio once in a while."

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When starting a piece, they work initially with loose lines and angles and take inspiration from them. Each individual piece then gradually evolves as they combine their skills to add different aspects. There are a number of underlying recurring themes in their work, including a notable absence of mouths and instead, a strong focus on eyes and hands. The pair feel that these exist as a more important and telling means of human interaction than any verbal communication and have managed, from a spray can, to achieve the seemingly impossible of creating a story and a depth



behind their characters' eyes. This is emphasised further by an apparent 'rule of three' which runs through a lot of their work, whether intentional or not "the number three is hugely important in Christianity and in occult symbolism," Neil explains, "both of which feature heavily in our work."

Having painted on the streets for years, I was intrigued to know their take on the ever growing trend of street artists exhibiting in galleries. "I get tired of the whole gallery side of things," explains Neil. "I mean, I love putting on a show, but as with most things when money gets involved it tends to ruin it. I think we used to believe in working within a gallery environment but over the last year or so we've become increasingly jaded with that whole culture for numerous reasons. That said we'll almost certainly return to a gallery environment at some stage in the future."

At the end of my chat with these guys I succumbed to the urge to ask some cliché questions. Recounting their best ever painting experiences, the duo told me about working alongside artists like Logan Hicks, Will Barras and Ben Eine on a project in Gambia called Wide Open Walls, which was a scheme that turned some of the village of Kubuneh into a living art project. "It was the most beautiful experience, an amazing place, amazing people and amazing artists." Then, asked what legacy they will leave on the world and what they consider being the best ever at, Hadley, ever the humble artist, told me that he doesn't want to be the best at something, he just wants to draw what he sees. Neil, on the other hand, reckons the pictures of him "painting steel in the buff" will never be bettered. I unfortunately haven't had the pleasure of seeing those photographs but I'm sure you will now all be tossing this magazine aside and racing for the computer to frantically hunt them down.