

SOFT AS STEEL

Artist DANIEL TURNER on wandering between scrapyards and architectural icons.

Artwork DANIEL TURNER
Interview ALYSE ARCHER-COITÉ

ALYSE ARCHER-COITÉ You grew up in Portsmouth, Virginia, a city with miles of waterfront and shipyards and a rich industrial history. How much influence did the industrial environment have on your childhood?

DANIEL TURNER As a child I was always fascinated with the scale of the surrounding industry, particularly with the shipyards, although the entire area seems to carry an invisible weight—in particular, the Jamestown Settlement, which was America's first English colony.

AAC I read that you used to help your father, a scrap metal merchant, in the city's industrial dockyards, picking up a lot of trash and recycling materials. This offered you the opportunity to interact with objects that most people might consider disposable. Can you tell me about any memorable objects you encountered in the dockyards? Have any resurfaced in your practice?

DT The most memorable objects for me were the burn barrels. Early on, I incorporated the barrels in true Rauschenberg-like form.

AAC What effect has moving to New York City had on your work?

DT Since I moved to New York in 2008, the city has made me pay more attention to architectural nuances, the way the body navigates an object or an environment. That's something I paid little attention to prior to living here. Formally speaking, it's cleaned up my work.

AAC You live in South Street Seaport and your studio is in Greenpoint. Are there any parallels between the town you grew up in and these neighborhoods? Do you think that you have either consciously or unconsciously chosen these areas in search of familiarity?

DT You know, I've never thought of that. It was an unconscious decision on my part.

AAC Your show at Team Gallery last year was titled "PM." What do the night hours mean to you or your practice?

DT It's simply easier to work at night, as there are fewer distractions and fewer demands. I think a great deal of artists work this way.

AAC What's your process for choosing materials?

DT I have a piece of pipe and faucet lying on the floor in my studio that I had been really frustrated with. Then I applied some chemicals and pressure, pulled back the stainless steel exterior and uncovered a gilded inside. Materials surprise me daily.

AAC What is it about a sterile and neutral aesthetic that interests you?

DT Clarity.

AAC I know you've mentioned in the past that the rubbed steel wool works were inspired by your time as a guard at the New Museum, where leaning against the wall (which was prohibited) would inevitably leave a mark. Have other jobs directly influenced a piece?

DT Yes. I've worked as a roofer, which led me to use roofing cement in a series of wall-based works, titled "5150." The key is to explore environments that your work has led you to. This way, a continuous rotation occurs.

AAC I read a book in college called *Wanderlust* about how the best ideas in history have come to their creators while on a walk. Walking has been considered the greatest conduit for creative energy and manifestation. You also have a similar relationship to walking. You've said that you could walk around the city for six months dwelling on an idea. Where do you walk?

DT I've walked from my studio in Greenpoint all the way to Bridgehampton, and to Dia Beacon. I walk all over New York when I'm developing an idea.

AAC One final thought—stone house in the woods or glass house on the beach?

DT Stone house in the woods.



From left:
Daniel Turner, *Burning an entire body of work*,
thirty five paintings, gasoline, south east Virginia, 2006.

Untitled, UV tinted glass, rubber, 60 × 90 × 3 in, 2015.
All images courtesy of the artist