

Art

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Studio visit

Christopher Ulivo

The painter, 31, talks about the great outdoors—and indoors.

By T.J. Carlin

You have new paintings up right now in Chelsea at Susan Inglett Gallery. What inspired them?

My deep love of adventure literature and nature documentaries. But being an enthusiast means my imagination far exceeds my understanding of the subject. My take on adventure and exploration tends to pick up some of the mundane aspects of everyday life. More Carl Reiner than Margaret Mead. The title of the show, "Who Needs the Explorers Club Anyway?," refers to the fabled Explorers Club on 70th Street, where the greatest explorers meet to sip cocktails and swap stories. Unqualified even to become a member of the "Friends of the Explorers Club," I have channeled my envy into art and feel the better for it.

You have a live-work space. Tell me a little bit about your studio and what you like about working at home.

The building where I live and work is in Bay Ridge. My great-grandmother bought two adjacent buildings here after emigrating from Naples. She placed most of her nine children and their spouses in the apartments. There were a lot of really colorful people growing up and raising children in these buildings. It was a living stereotype of old Brooklyn. My wife, Goska, and I have an apartment upstairs and I use the basement as my studio. The basement was, for decades, the meeting place for holidays, funerals and christenings. There is a lot of old dinnerware around and family photos bearing evidence of its use. I didn't function nearly as well when I was working in one of those renovated studio facilities in Gowanus. Spending lots of time in a dusty basement is conducive to a certain strain of creative thought about the faraway world. That is why every year or so you hear about some guy in the Bronx trying to raise a tiger in his apartment. If he knew how to paint, he wouldn't need the tiger.

You're a recent art-school grad. What's it like being out in the world?

I do miss being part of an institution. There was something civic about all the work the faculty, staff and students were doing. I like going back there to work for that reason. But the benefit of working in New York is connecting with people of different interests, ethnicities and ages. I certainly don't see eye-to-eye with everyone I meet here but I'm glad I have to deal with them—they give me good material.

Do you have any extracurricular activities?

My wife and I like to go bird-watching. We are expecting a baby so I wonder how small they make binoculars. Prospect Park is a surprisingly good place to go for kingfishers, green herons, all sorts of stuff. They must order them from the Cornell ornithology lab or something. I think I saw an ivory-billed woodpecker once on the Q train.



DINOSAUR JR The artist's enthusiasm for his subject exceeds his understanding of it
Photographs: Roxana marroquin; Courtesy of Susan Inglett



Christopher Ulivo, Prehistoric Park: Saber Tooth with a Welder

Christopher Ulivo's "Who Needs the Explorers Club Anyway?" is at Susan Inglett Gallery, through Oct 11.