

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Interview: New York-based artist Dan Colen, on debut Scottish show *The Illusion of Life*

Colen's work sits at the intersection of postmodern ennui and darkly amusing pop art playfulness

David Pollock



Photo: Christopher Burke

‘The different bodies of my work end themselves when there’s no more discovery to be had,’ says Dan Colen, alumnus of the brash early-2000s downtown Manhattan art scene, whose penchant for using spray paint and chewing gum as materials, and appropriating Disney-style images even as he attempts to recreate the pattern of bird droppings in paint, has conjured a body of work that sits at the intersection of postmodern ennui and darkly amusing pop art playfulness.

This show, his first in Scotland, is a result of that process of reaching a conclusion to his previous method of practise, although in trying to get away from his ‘flower paintings’ – made by using the flower almost as a brush, stroking the surface of the paper or being thrown violently against it – he’s created a whole new set which this time come with their own sculptural companions. ‘It’s hard to talk too in-depth about the sculptures, because they’re such a new set of options,’ he says on the line from his New York studio.

‘Some of them are pretty basic constructions with everyday materials,’ he continues. There’s a twisting tower of books that looks like it penetrates through the building (the show’s title is taken from the Disney animation ‘bible’, a popular reference text for Colen) and some mechanised pieces, like a pair of shoes which dance on the ceiling’. The urge behind each new shift in his methods, he says, is to start off with a very basic material or situation and then to figure out how to make the mark that only it can. ‘Usually by the end of the process I’m tuned into what satisfies me about it most, I’ve seen the potential and I know how to exploit it. Here, the paintings almost function like backdrops, they’re like vortexes into psychedelic other worlds.’