



# the Stranger

Ethan Murrow Remains Buoyant

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CORANTON HALE



*"I have a fascination with flowers as symbols of luxury... I've always felt they perfectly summarize the ways in which we happily pay for short-term pleasure while ignoring or pushing aside long-term consequences."* COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Ethan Murrow is a Boston-based artist whose work examines historical narratives and absurdist landscapes in search of beauty, perseverance, and the value of optimism. He is a Professor of the Practice at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University where he specializes in Drawing and site-specific

**Winston Wächter Fine Art, Inc.**

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projects. In our interview, we talk about the nuances of various mediums, his great attention to detail, and the unwavering spirit of his fictional characters.

**Let's start with mediums, what are your primary tools and substrates?**

I work in graphite, acrylic, and ink, moving between works on paper, panel, canvas, and drawing on ceramics. Each medium brings its own particular challenges and nuances, but in all of them I strive to balance a mix of highly detailed representation with an honest exposure of process, allowing mark and surface to be revealed when a viewer is close.



*Acreage Mystic* ETHAN MURROW

**And you've explored some brand new mediums for your current show, *Ever Buoyant*, at Winston Wächter, how did you come to painting on ceramics, and what do you use?**

I have a fascination with flowers, as symbols of luxury, bounty, beauty, and superficiality, and a lingering sense of fragility and death. I've always felt they perfectly summarize the ways in which we happily pay for short-term pleasure while ignoring or pushing aside long-term consequences. To be totally fair, I participate in this happy farce all the time. This led me to think about the vessels

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they often sit in and the ways in which I could use these forms to talk about the symbolic power of vegetation, even when the real plants are not even present. The ceramics are meant to function as image tricksters, both volumetric and flat all at once, because of the detail in the drawings. For these pieces, we built sanded acrylic bases on top of the ceramics, then worked with ink, and finally varnished them to build stability.



*Mechanics* ETHAN MURROW

**Your work has been described as “intimately detailed” which conveys reverence and patience. Does attention to detail come naturally in your life?**

I was, and am, a bouncy kid, craving constant movement and needing to burn off energy. Years ago, when I realized that I could channel that fizz into a method that demanded incessant focus, it was really one of the first times I was able to own that character trait and re-purpose it in a new manner. I love the way in which a complex, epic drawing process allows for simultaneous deep thinking and daydreaming as days and days go by working out small details. My hope is that this long form of image-making and the full worlds I aim to create with it help to reinforce some of the stories I tell, about characters who are also immensely committed to the actions they are involved in. It does take patience—I don't see myself as patient but motivated and just a tiny bit idiotic to choose

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such a hard process and delighted that it continues to challenge me and offer new places of discovery.



*The Trap* ETHAN MURROW

**When a character is surrounded by book spines (as in “The Trap”) are these all real books you're referencing? How accurately does reality make its way into these fantastic scenarios?**

Each drawing or painting begins with sketches, prop building, and performances to develop imagery. Working with assistants, photographers, and other collaborators to develop resources for the work is one of the great joys of what I do. I am slowly owning up to the fact that there is a hint of the performance artist in my creative practice. These photos are then reworked with other found imagery into digital collages and then translated to the drawings and paintings. Within the process of making the pieces with paint and graphite, there are many shifts, additions, and edits, including things like re-crafting book titles and so on. So the books, their scale, their shadows, and so on, the figures, the masks, and props come directly from photography, but much of the rest of the work is an outright fiction.

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*Draught Test* ETHAN MURROW

### **What do you like to listen to when you're drawing?**

My wife and I used to live in Seattle and half of my extended family is from the PNW so there is deep nostalgia for the region. Because of this, it's not uncommon for me to be listening to KEXP. But more often than not I need the longest audiobook I can find, something gripping and epic, to keep me motivated while I draw hour upon hour. Right now I am listening to *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller, which opens up this Mediterranean tale to a more complex view of history, sexuality, identity, and hardship. It's really f-ing good!

Ethan Murrow's new show [Ever Buoyant](#) is at [Winston Wächter Fine Art](#) through June 30. Find more of Ethan's work at [bigpaperairplane.com](http://bigpaperairplane.com) and follow him on Instagram at [@ethanmurrow](#).

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