



## Multi-talented artist Jake Troyli uses humor to discuss race and otherness

Juggling an art major with a full basketball scholarship, the Chicago-based artist discusses the creative journey that led him to perfect the high-skilled techniques of the Northern Renaissance.

Words: [Elfie Thomas](#) 17 February 2022

Jake Troyli's stunningly articulated paintings summon the dramatic compositions and technical accuracy of the Northern Renaissance while tackling very contemporary issues: the commodification of the Black/Brown body and the construction of otherness. These disparate elements are woven together by a satirical sense of humour, giving rise to titles like *Deposition in Burberry* and *Plein air painting in the Off-White Jordan*. "Access is important to me, and I think the humour and my handling of paint can facilitate that," the artist tells It's Nice That. "But more important to me is the potential to be subversive, to draw someone in with something that's immediately very attractive but is just the surface of a conversation that's much heavier, and in some cases darker."

The first time Jake "touched paint" unusually coincided with him winning a full scholarship to play D1 basketball at university. While his scholarship was for sports, he majored in art. "The NCAA likes to pretend that playing a sport doesn't negatively impact your ability to maximise your education, but it's almost impossible to balance, especially when your major is so hands-on." Juggling a very practical degree with pressure from basketball meant that he didn't get a chance to hone his practice until he started applying to grad school. Despite the distractions of his undergrad days, he attributes his experience with basketball as "integral in terms of the overarching social issues I ruminate on with my work."

Considering the difficulties he faced in the early stages of his creative journey, it's impressive to see the skill with which he now transfers complex ideas into paint. But Jake has always been a "visual thinker", he tells us. "I am constantly making quick, immediate drawings as they come into my head. I think of this as a kind of exorcism, clearing out the images as they come, and then later seeing which (if any) of them can be worked into paintings."

# moniquemeloche

451 N Paulina Street, Chicago 60622  
312 243 2129 moniquemeloche.com



Jake Troyli: *The Crowd Surfer*, 2021 (Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago)

While his body of work often revolves around self-portraiture, it is his larger, multi-figure paintings such as *Don't Forget to Pack a Lunch!* that he is most proud of. In these pieces he likes to “reward viewership” with intricate maximalist imagery and complex narratives. He views these large scale pieces as “sun-like”, he says, “with my other works orbiting, drawing context from them and in many cases, replicating vignettes drawn directly from them.” We can expect to see two of these larger narrative paintings in his new exhibition *Slow Clap* at the Monique Meloche Gallery later this month, Jake assures us.

Looking closer at these lovingly-composed and carefully executed narratives, it is clear to see that Jake is a real admirer of “craft”. This is what drew him to the old masters of the Northern Renaissance. With the determination and tenacity he cultivated on the basketball courts, Jake aspires to the talent of his 16th century influences: “they are so beautiful and masterful and strange that I could never truly match them, but I will always chase that level of ability.”

moniquemeloche

451 N Paulina Street, Chicago 60622  
312 243 2129 moniquemeloche.com



Jake Troyli: Super fan (Copyright © Jake Troyli, 2021)

moniquemeloche

451 N Paulina Street, Chicago 60622  
312 243 2129 moniquemeloche.com



Jake Troyli: *On your Marks!*, 2021 (Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago)