



# CHICAGO ART MAGAZINE

## James Olley at Kasia Kay Art Projects

0

By Chicago Art Magazine on Apr 05, 2010 in [Featured](#), [Reviews](#)

by Liz Dyla



Water Baby, James Olley

The west loop is also a contradiction in itself. It is an industrial area, still the meatpacking district, yet it is the home to some of the most provocative commercial work the Chicago art scene produces. Nestled between the Fulton Market factories is Kasia Kay Art Projects, a contemporary art beacon. Steel façade and large floor to ceiling windows radiate a warm glow while maintaining a welcoming and inviting atmosphere. As you swing open the glass doors the smell of oil paint permeates the gallery ambiance.

James Olley, Canadian born and educated artist, is a master of opposing forces. His figurative narratives embody control vs. spontaneity. He describes his work as a 'visual mathematical equation' and 'self-reflective'. He describes himself as a mad scientist, but there is a method to the madness. Olley's paintings are tactile, layered, and painterly. His technique comes from a modern school of thought: starting with an under painting, then blocking in shapes which slowly build to thus create forms recognizable to the viewer.

The observer's gaze is manipulated, pulled in then thrust back by the technical aspects of the work. He uses powerful impasto, and dynamic broken brushwork to activate the picture plane and the senses. The process varies slightly from piece to piece and he cites Goya, Picasso, Van Gogh, and Renoir as sources of inspiration. You can see how these artists have influenced Olley, revealed through his keen ability to represent pure energy with richly textured, thickly painted, manic yet precisely formulated strokes.

The juxtaposition of his subject matter and technique is just another interesting facet of these paintings. The subject matter revolves around Olley's pleasant family memories, but he has no set image when he paints. Instead he draws from the feeling of the memory structured by working from photo reference. He explained this as assembling 'bits of images that correlate to a narrative', but the idea of documenting a transitory memory is also contradictory, as it is forever encapsulating a momentary feeling into a static image. The images also develop through the act of painting itself and a strikingly acidic palette, warranting a feeling of unrest, contrasts these intimate scenes.



Trampoline, James Olley

This unsettling feeling is fleshed out even more because the sensation of being a voyeur. In *Trampoline* we are watching two figures, on what seems like a summers day, the smaller figure is sitting, the other figure is in motion, just about to complete a bounce. Very rarely does the subject of the painting engage the viewer. *Water Baby* is one of the exceptions to this rule; a blond seductress emerges from neon ripples and dark background, her gaze is directly on the viewer.

Through these snapshot like images, a slice of life, a fleeting moment, has been captured, and one becomes an on looker into the human experience as well as the consciousness of the artist, but participating in Olley's work is like chasing the energy of a moment. This is obviously not an accident. There is no doubt that he controls both the psychological form and physical material.

*Kasia Kay Art Projects* is located on 215 N. Aberdeen St. Chicago IL 60607. Gallery hours are Thursday – Saturday 11:30am – 5pm, Tues and Wed by appointment. James Olley In Motion is running from March 26<sup>th</sup> – May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010.



Kasia Kay Art Projects

[Share / Save](#) [+](#) [f](#) [t](#) [d](#)