

An Interview With Artist Colin Stinson

By [sobasc](#) | Published: December 3, 2010



Pink Wave OIL ON LINEN, 2010 64x 75 in.

I met Colin in 2008 when he commissioned GOG to make some sounds for his project *Heavy Fierce Brightness*. The concepts and ideas that he presents can seem cloaked in mystery (purposefully) at first, but given the time to set in you reach a personal connection and understanding. I admire his attention to detail and finish. That attention shows in his thought-provoking output. We had a brief conversation about his multidisciplinary art/studio, some new projects he's working on (*Fortress*, 1 painting pictured above) and some ethereal randomness. A very nice guy and an extremely imaginative talented artist.

Is multidisciplinary how you would describe your creative output over time or are different disciplines found in every project?

CS: Well... The total output of my studio is multidisciplinary. It's an important overarching concept for me. Several of my projects cross multiple disciplines in and of themselves, like *The Six Drunken Masters* and *Heavy Fierce Brightness*, while other projects follow very traditional formats. The project I'm

working on right now, called *Fortress*, is a series of oil paintings on linen. It's a straightforward, classical discipline appropriate for the project. So, I'd say I'm comfortable with both traditional and multidisciplinary approaches to art making. Each project has its own set of requirements and selecting the approach is like selecting the right brush or instrument. Every project is unique but my creative output is best described as multidisciplinary.

I'm really into the subject matter of your current project Fortress (in your own words: an abstract paintings about natural systems; physics of the sun/energy controlled by magnetic fields; a sophisticated color use combined with a primitive attack). In the example you sent (Pink Wave) I definitely see the sophisticated and the attack. The perceived random and the raw of the sun (particles, molecules, visualizing gravity or anything) being formed or controlled. Could be a subject matter or underlying theme an artist could devote possibly a whole career on. Is there one thing that seems to be an underlying factor in all your work no matter what discipline? (Questioning the perceived "authority" of science / life?)

CS: The importance of imagination. A rich imagination combined with quality production is something people have come to expect from my studio. My projects vary in content but often deal with the point at which natural and unnatural worlds converge.

Is the work presented in Fortress painting to understand and at the same time question things for yourself as well as the viewer?

CS: Referencing the sun's complex balance of chaos and organization is a way to model reality, and so in a sense, yes... to understand the human experience. I'm interested in the physics of the sun up to a point of general understanding but I'm not interested in illustrating scientific accuracy. Viewers can enter the imagery at any point and take what they want. Again, these are abstract paintings about natural systems.



Fortress is currently 5 paintings and a book. Is the book a way of making your art available to more than just the 5 that are lucky enough to score an original CS painting? Sort of the Keith Haring school of thought?

CS: Keith Haring is an interesting reference. I remember walking into his PopShop and almost being overwhelmed by a visual onslaught... it was just so New York. I think a logical evolution of his ideas would be something like Takashi Murakami's inclusion of a functioning Louis Vuitton shop within his retrospective exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. I've explored similar concepts in projects like *The Six Drunken Masters* (2006), which united product design and 'fine art', (for lack of a better term). The Fortress book is not only an extension of the project but another way to access its content. A book extends the impact of the project and acts as a portable reference with its own characteristics.

Cool, you've been to one of Keith Haring's PopShops, I'm guessing sometime in the 80's?, when was that? Are they still around?

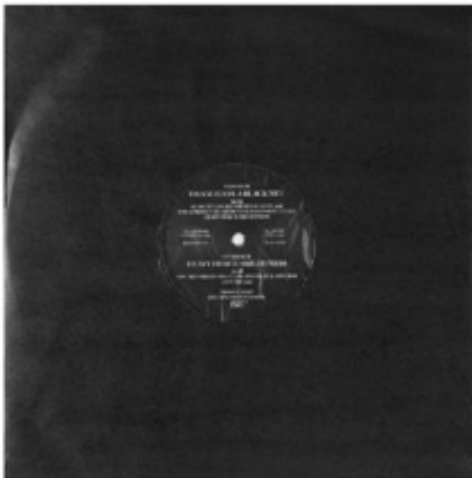
CS: Let's just say CBGB's was still rockin'... No, they closed the brick and mortar shops a few years ago and moved on-line.

I know you tried out a shop somewhere in SF? That is where I was getting the similarities, not in the visual aspect, but just the idea I suppose.

CS: Yeah, the CS Drop Shop in 2007. It was in Dogpatch off 3rd Street. The idea was to create a temporary space combining architecture, design, artist products and original artworks outside the gallery system. It was a culture and retail mashup, which successfully showcased my interest in crossing disciplines. As a standalone shop project it had to have a bit of planned obsolescence built in. Today this idea is getting to be pretty familiar with various 'pop-up' shops appearing all over.

What made you make the leap into art and visual expression? Any artists that sparked that "ah-ha" moment to become a visual artist, or maybe it was a day at a museum or gallery?

CS: Less of a leap and more of a falling-out-of-bed feeling [laughs]... One of my early experiences with the mysteries of art was viewing the Treasures of Tutankhamun exhibition organized by the Met. It wasn't just the visceral quality of solid gold objects but their cryptic cosmology and ability to tell stories, which seemed otherworldly and alluring. King Tut was one of many early sparks ... it's hard to pin down, you know? You might see some of this early interest in mythology in projects like Heavy Fierce Brightness.



HEAVY FIERCE BRIGHTNESS

VINYL LP RECORD OF INSTALLATION SOUND COMMISSION,
RECORD SLEEVE FRONT AND BACK, INNER SLEEVE, AND VINYL

12 x 12 in. (30,5 x 30,5 cm)

I can't remember exactly where or who said this but she, (she and sometime in the 50's – I remember that), was talking about when you can see the technique in a painting and said something like, "any great abstract painting should look like it was done in one move if any at all." Do you agree with that statement?

CS: When I worked at MOMA I was exposed to a great collection of paintings borne from this idea. A straightforward interpretation would be something like an 'enso', or Zen circle, but the concept of a single, decisive move is really a plea to stop over thinking something in general. In this way, with enough experience, a series of moves can act like one move. Great abstract painting has this quality. The latest series of terrific Gerhard Richter paintings is convincing me of the idea.

How does this fit in with a "primitive attack"?

CS: A primitive attack is executed without a lot of forethought through experienced hands, so the idea dovetails very nicely with what you're talking about. Look at late Morandi for example – it seems as if he's simply painting these bottles, but the more you try to understand what you're looking at the more you're drawn in to the act of looking and enjoying these effortless lines. It's that kind of slow burn I was after in the Fortress paintings. They contain a sense of the 'one move' aesthetic, but are built up over time. I think Edward G. Robinson said it best in *Scarlet Street*, "Every painting is a love affair".

Recently it was revealed that the CIA was covertly sponsoring/promoting abstract art (Jackson Pollock, etc.)? They were doing this in order to make America "appear" more forward thinking. Setting up purchasers and even running magazines that promoted abstract expression. When I found this out my first thought was "damn, why don't they do this now!?" Did you read that article, if not can I forward it to you?

CS: [Laughs] ... Yeah, sounds about right – I bet we'll be seeing Government art dealers in the not too distant future – Gallery USA! They could use the sales commission to resuscitate the NEA. No, I didn't read that ... I'd like to see it if you get a chance. America was really hell bent on shifting art world power away from Europe after WWII. All in all, I bet American artists appreciated the positive boost. It's good to see a more international focus these days and an acceptance of multidisciplinary studios like mine.