

What isn't staged—is that a sarcastic question or a serious assertion?



WHAT ISN'T STAGED

artist Paul Rutz

I'll tell you, I'd love for the title of this show to be a serious assertion because I think surprise beauty and accidental fun feel precious: a pile of spoons as they're dropped by a toddler, a summer street bent through the neck of a wine bottle, an athlete warming up with an unusual angle to the light. I'm attracted to plenty that isn't staged, and as a painter I try to convey the feelings that go with those moments.

But my work—it's staged. It's all staged. For every picture you see here, I've choreographed every body and prop in my studio, sketched them, repositioned them and started over. I've focused the portable lights, spiked the studio floors with masking tape and returned each morning to study those contrived scenes. Don't be fooled.

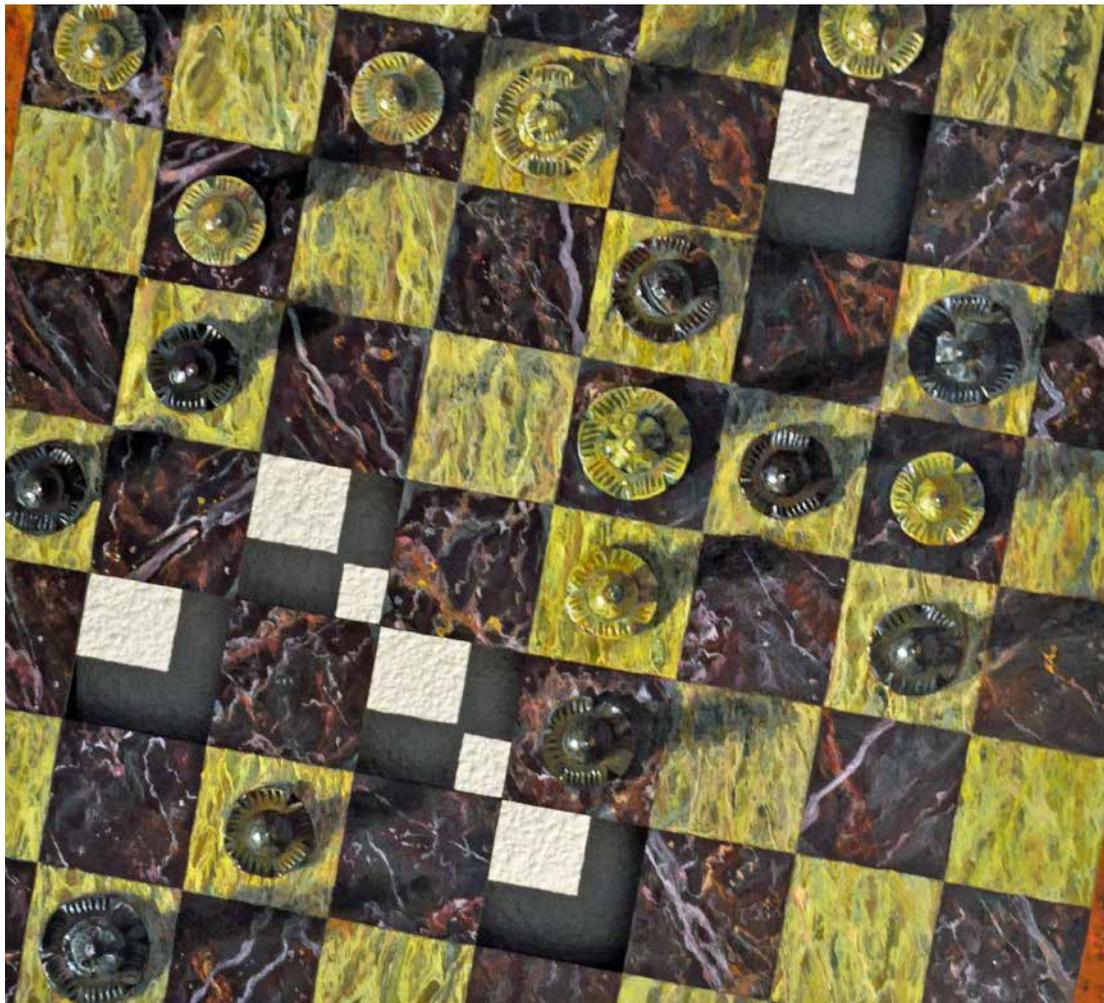
This elaborate staging, the labor itself, is the point for me. I don't use photos to help me make a picture. Instead I employ live models, scrounge for props and appreciate the chance to spend long hours finding a way to picture them.

Unless you're Clement Greenberg (who said painting is only about itself), painting is about making compelling illusions, and I love the search for novel ways to do that. I enjoy spending the day studying a detail on a chessboard or middle finger, and discovering how to communicate that at a glance. So painting suits me, especially with some Tom Waits music playing in the background. And it suits me to play with the rules of painting, from looking for new ways to spark picture ideas to asking whether Renaissance perspective is the best way to convey the illusion of depth.

I make up rules for myself. For the paintings hanging here, I measured every body part and every plate or spoon at exactly life size, so to some extent all these pictures communicate what it's like to be there sizing up the subject. That's why I carved through panels in some of these pictures, setting real shadows against trompe l'oeil shadows. It's a chance to indulge in some echo of the 3-D parallax we see when we walk past things.

With all this artifice, I hope I'm showing you a place through which to look differently at our real, spontaneous world.





ABOUT PAUL RUTZ

Paul X. Rutz received his Ph.D. in Theory and Cultural Studies from Purdue University in 2011 after writing a dissertation on combat art and the Iraq war. That year Rutz took his portrait painting practice to Portland, OR, where he develops life-size oil paintings working almost exclusively with live models. His past exhibitions include solo shows at both Portland and Clatsop Community Colleges, and group shows at Mark Woolley Gallery and the Smithsonian Institution. His series of dual-media portraits of combat veterans, titled *Between Here and There*, has traveled to galleries in Portland, Vashon Island, WA, and the Oregon Military Museum. Rutz also writes about visual culture, with recent publications in the *Huffington Post*, *Modern Fiction Studies* and *Cincinnati Review*.