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Artist of the week 189: Sean Landers

The king of artistic overshare splurges his carefully crafted composite of truth and fiction over legal pads, giant canvases and ad hoc videos



Truth or fiction? Detail of MacPhee (2009).

Photograph: Sean Landers/Greengrassi, London

[Sean Landers](#) has built his artistic career on oversharing. In the 1990s, he splurged his innermost thoughts about art, money, sex, friends, family and business associates, first in ballpoint pen on yellow legal notepads and later in painted slanting script on giant canvases. His stream-of-consciousness digressions-cum-confessions typically veer between painfully honest stuff about his art dealer, critics, popularity and market value to even more painful assertions of his own brilliance, often both at once ("I represent the ass-end of the artworld, at least I hope I do", reads a cheeky line from 1993's *Patches*).

The writing meanders through philosophy, rock music, masturbatory musings and hilarious waffle ("I just caught myself talking to an electrical chord", he admits in that same early work). [Landers's novel \[Sic\]](#), a 400-plus-page comic epic traversing the artist's sense of self, might be the [Gen-X answer to Tristram Shandy](#). He's also made ad hoc videos of himself dancing like a rubber giraffe. Once, he set a chimp loose in his studio and filmed it. Then there are his more traditional works, bronze busts and figurative paintings. These include his own interpretations of famous works like [Hogarth's A Modern Midnight Conversation](#), and paintings featuring aliens, disembodied breasts and his recurring alter egos, a clown and a monkey.

Alongside [John Currin](#) and [Lisa Yuskavage](#), Landers studied art at Yale in the 1980s at the height of over-inflated art market madness. Though a feted young gun, he hit the New York art world just as the bubble burst. As such, his early works flaunted authenticity, including a heartfelt letter written to his student loan officer about just how little he was actually

selling. Yet as with the angsty self-aware/self-deluded screen persona of Woody Allen, Landers's routine is a carefully crafted composite of truth and fiction.



Signature screeds ... Detail of Binoculars (2012).

Photograph: Jason Mandella/Sean Landers/Greengrassi, London

His latest series of paintings depict shelves stacked with books whose titles spell out his signature screeds, including the line "I am a painting not a man I exist in paint only." These accompany a selection of terracotta busts of famous authors with silver and gold skins, Beckett, Poe, Melville, Joyce and one woman, Dickinson, among them.

In place of the heroic genius those greats are celebrated for, Landers shows us the misshapen dance between dreams of greatness and human foibles that goes on behind the scenes. While his target is the old-fashioned notion of artistic genius, his overblown ego, false starts and plummeting doubt are something we can surely all relate to.

Why we like him: If anyone embodied the maverick, macho painter fantasy it was Picasso. Just as Picasso aligned his own work to that of [Velázquez](#), Landers claimed kinship with the modern master in a 2001 series of paintings reinterpreting his iconic forms. "Sean Landers" and "Genius" are among the words his Picasso-esque shapes spell.

Word up: Landers used to write a column for Spin Magazine called Genius Lessons.

Where can I see him: At [Greengrassi](#), London to 16 June.