

j. Reto - bio

j.Reto (b. 7-17-67, Bangor, PA)

Raised in rural Pennsylvania, in a small slate mining town, much of j.'s early childhood was spent exploring nature. Long hikes through birch and pine tree woods, exploring shale pits and crayfish hunting in 'cricks' occupied his free time. Examining the complexities and beauty of the natural world helped to define his abstract, critical approach to art, while the seasonal changes from his youth have established his color palette.

Being a lone outdoorsman also cemented his 'outsider' sensibility. j. found an arts education in the galleries and museums of larger cities like Philadelphia and New York; and later, Buffalo, Rochester, San Diego and LA. He approached the galleries as if tracking flora and fauna in the forest and gleaned insights from each era, technique and subject matter. But knowing art history does not equate the ability to create art. He was been the recipient of numerous art awards and honors in the county.

A shift from the traditional occurred when he moved to upstate NY in 1987. There he found representation from an art agent, Romolo Celli (nephew of artist, Ramón Santiago), and along with a few other artists, they started, Artworks Gallery, which ran until 1993. Toted as one of the most prolific artists in the group, j. was known for his watercolour series. But j. was not happy with his conventional output, and in an attempt to recalibrate his creative sights, he left Rochester for California in 1991.

Throughout the 90s, j. worked in TV and Film Production at Kevin M. Glover Productions and Aries Post. Having done set design, set construction, and graphic design work for various video and film works, as well as band promotion and album artwork.

Periodically, j. would sell his art or take on commissions, but this was a time in which he was cultivating his own artist voice, which was mostly devoid of the techniques and themes that were so well received a few years earlier. "I really wanted to get back to a place which was uniquely me," he said. "It was a spiritual time; a rebirth; and I wanted to be more pure with my influences. I was struggling against my conditioning...fighting against my safe aesthetic...getting to a more primal and instinctual place."

What emerged was an extensive series of soft muted works that distill his naturalistic upbringing, his difficult medical experiences and his exploration of a lone voice rings true to his own story. The "Gesso works," as he calls them, are a three layered construction. Using wallpaper paste, j. creates a random collage field of colour that harkens to the forest floor of Pennsylvania. The collage-covered canvas is then covered in a scrim, which is reminiscent of disconnect during his childhood convalescence; an amalgam of hospital bandages, partitioning, and curtains that kept him from the outside world. Then the action- the taking of the most basic of compounds, gesso, and creating order out of the chaos. He sections off areas, defines commonalities, merges contrasting elements until a quite is achieved. Once the piece reaches that point, it is his obligation to let the piece ultimately define itself. It is not when j. says it is done, but when the painting speaks that it is finished.