

60wrd/min COVID Edition: Morgan Sims

NOVEMBER 6, 2020 AT 7:00 AM BY [LORI WAXMAN](#) In this weekly column, art critic Lori Waxman adapts her [60wrd/min](#) project to review work by artists whose practice has been affected by the pandemic. Waxman covers shows that have been cancelled, postponed, shuttered, made remote or opened by limited appointment, as well as art made during quarantine. Reviews are written in the order in which requests are received. This iteration of 60wrd/min is a democratic, good-faith effort to document more of the art making that is happening at a time when much of it is relatively unobserved.



Installation shot of "Morgan Sims: Camouflage for Earth" at Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago, 2020

Morgan Sims

A painter of irregularly shaped drip and spatter pictures, and a maker of graphically precise neon sculptures, it was only a matter of time before Morgan Sims put it all together. The resulting exhibition, “Camouflage for Earth,” on limited view this past summer at Bert Green Fine Art in Chicago, contains canvases in vivid all-over patterns of camo, gesture and blur, each topped with a haloing dash of colored neon. The overall effect is strangely cinematic, evoking images of movement in a dark and rainy futuristic city, like watching “Blade Runner” through a squint. If that’s not sexy and way you tilt your head. And do: the paintings, though wall hung, have no given orientation, a state enhanced by their being circles, triangles and trapeziums. Imagine “Nightshade” and “Lava” displayed flat, and the excitement of circling them as a viewer.



CHICAGO

Morgan Sims: "Paintings and Neon" at Bert Green Fine Art

On display in Morgan Sims' first solo exhibition at Bert Green Fine Art is a series of paintings, precise yet painterly with a consistent compositional formula: flat grounds behind a central, dripping "figure." Housed alone in a separate room in the gallery is *Rocket* (all works cited 2013), a lone, freestanding neon sculpture composed of panels of gridded tubes, each of its three sides emitting a different colored light. In theory, these two disparate practices might not seem to have much to do with each other, but despite the inherent differences in the material and the making-processes, Sims' paintings and sculpture complement and inform one another through a thoughtful engagement with viewers' perceptions.

Each of the seven paintings in Sims' exhibition features a single image translated into a conglomeration of chunky, pixel-like squares; each "pixel" is filled with paint that runs down the canvas, the drips converging into a dense, bubbled skin. Though the pixelation and the dripping abstract the imagery twofold, most subjects are still basically recognizable, like the humorous "melting" strawberry in *Daiquiri* and the eerily oozing black-and-white *Moon*. Even when the image can't be clearly read, as in the neutral, pastry-colored *Delight* or the algae-like green and turquoise *Aquatic*, the palettes and shapes still manage to conjure up inklings of something familiar. Reinforcing this

notion is the largest painting in the show: a field of rainbow-colored pixels with a black-and-white dripping center. Pointedly entitled *Synesthesia*, this piece can be seen as a sort of symbolic index for the exhibition, a reminder that perception is not limited to what we see with our eyes.

Further complicating sight and perception is the effect of the buzzing light from *Rocket's* handcrafted neon tubes. This artificial light fills the small room in which it is displayed, and is funneled out the doorway into the space where the paintings are installed. The walls that we know to be white curiously appear pale purple or green, making the differences between the luminously painted grounds of the canvases and the illuminated walls on which they are hung difficult to decipher. Together, Sims' paintings and sculpture confuse light, paint and space in an exploration of the grey area of understanding between what we know and what we see.

—ROBIN DLUZEN

"DAIQUIRI," 2013

Morgan Sims

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 60" X 60"

PHOTO: COURTESY BERT GREEN FINE ART

NEWCITY Art

Reviews, profiles and news about art in Chicago

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JUL 30, 2013

Portrait of the Artist: Morgan Sims

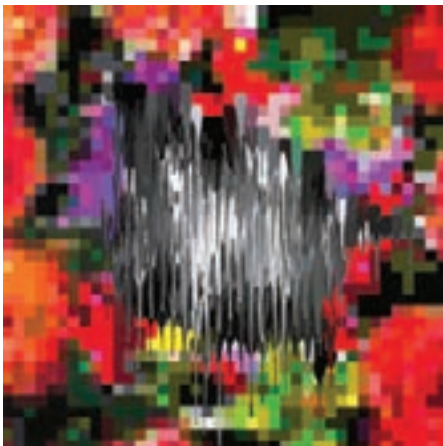
Michigan Avenue, Painting, Sculpture

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Morgan Sims grew up in a world of straight lines. As a teen he laid orderly rows of pipe with his father. His first exposure to art was his mother's quilts, works of abstract blocking in careful grids. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Sims trained as a printmaker and found satisfaction in the process. "I really enjoy the steps in printmaking. The process is fun, I like that it's hands-on."

While he still makes prints, Sims is starting to become known for his rich, pixelated paintings and neon sculptures. He has been in well-received group shows at Heaven Gallery, and his tent-like neon sculpture "Palisade" was a standout at the MDW Fair last year. At Bert Green Fine Art, Sims is having his first solo show in three years.



His affinity for lines continues in his current work. "Printing has informed my painting and neon work. I use a lot of grids, and straight lines." Lines are typically seen as units of definition. They mark the parameters of a thing; once something is explicitly delineated, it is complete. Sims doesn't want to be complete. He wants to evolve. "I'm afflicted with wanting my stuff to change."

Sims' artwork pushes what a line is capable of. "Cascade" is a series of neon sections leaned up against a wall at varying angles. Viewed from the side, the rigid lines become a graceful curve. "Gumby" uses block imaging to distort a familiar Gumby and Pokey almost beyond recognition. In Sims' hands, lines confuse the world instead of clarifying it.

Sims, like many artists, wrestles with conflicting ideas about art. Can work be accessible and artistically ingenuous? Can art that is rooted in the past still do something new? These questions can paralyze, or, per Sims, they can be fuel for creative fire. Answering those questions defines boundaries, but Sims doesn't work in finality.



"There are always things to compare yourself to. If you see something you've seen before, it needs to have a new iteration," he said. "I ask myself, 'how can I do something that's interesting? How can I do something new?'"

He talked about one of his favorite artists, James Turrell, and Turrell's massive, ongoing land art project, "Roden Crater." "You know, he had a retrospective of his career, and people are saying [Roden Crater] is like his 'magnum opus.' But what if it's not? What if it's just another big thing?" There won't be a magnum opus for Sims, just a series of bigger and more ambitious projects. He wouldn't allow himself to be boxed in by lines like that. (Meredith Wilson)

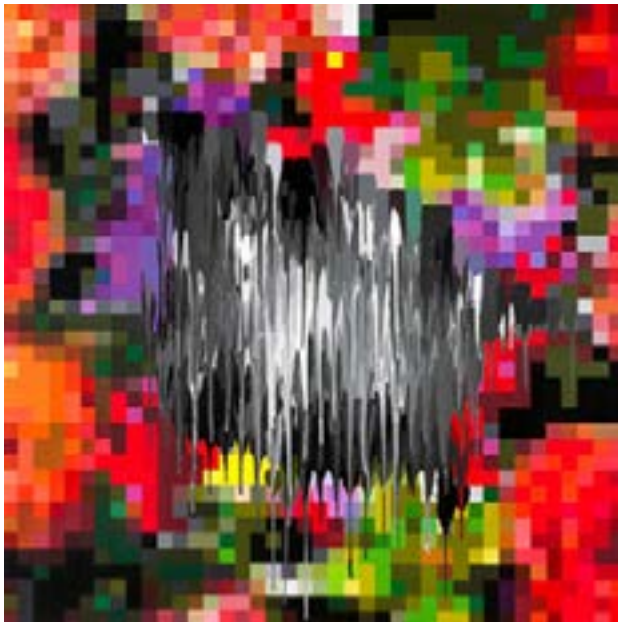
"Morgan Sims: Paintings and Neon" shows through August 24 at Bert Green Fine Art, 8 South Michigan, suite 1220

MONARCH DAILY

(<http://www.monarchdaily.com/>)

Added on July 9, 2013

Abstractions with Light and Paint: An Interview with Morgan Sims



Chicago-based artist Morgan Sims (<http://www.morgan-sims.com/>) paints abstractly, applying a digitized look to the formal fine art of painting. Some paintings appear pixelated or patterned. Some utilize a gradient that dips perfectly into different transitions of color. These colors all play off each other, often gridded, supporting a dripping abstracted form. In his painting **Daiquiri**, an oozing strawberry drips off the canvas while the gradient mimics the colors of the fruit. Sims also works in neon light, once again utilizing abstraction to his benefit. He experiments with using neon light in a structural way, combining different tubes of color in his installations.

Morgan has a solo exhibition of his paintings and neon at Bert Green Fine Art (<http://bgfa.us/>) in Chicago, Illinois from **July 13 – August 24, 2013**. Attend the opening on Saturday, July 13th, from 5 PM to 8 PM. For more information, click here (<http://www.thevisualist.org/2013/07/morgan-sims-paintings-and-neon/>). *Check out my interview with the artist below.*

Many of your works combine nature with a brand or famous company. How do you determine what different elements fit together?

If I'm interested in something specific like a logo, I'm usually attracted to the formal elements. I think about the design... the colors and the shapes.

Your paintings incorporate nature abstractions as well as the digital abstraction of pixels. What interests you about tying together both natural and digital elements?

I am process-oriented and my background in printmaking has made me super aware of image resolution so the digital pixelation comes from that aspect. Color is the formal element. As I work, it becomes less about the digitization and more about the physical properties of paint. I get to nerd out on mixing colors and surface quality!

Have you always worked abstractly? How did you get to where you are now?

Yes, for the last four or five years I've painted abstractly. In grad school, I was making prints and pushing them to be larger. Once I started printing with abstraction and simplified shapes, I wanted to go bigger and canvas seemed like the way to go.

Have you always wanted to be an artist?

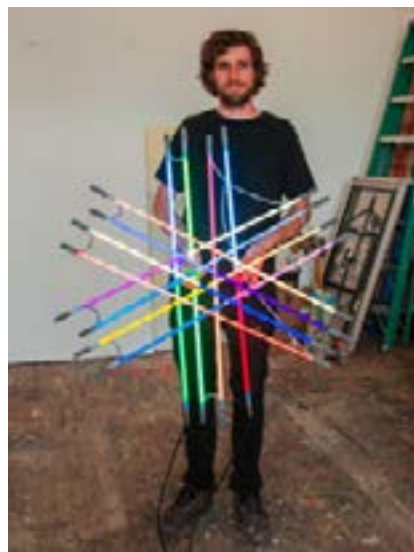
Yes, I always took art classes in high school and went to college specifically for art. I like that there's so much more freedom when you are your own client.

Do you ever hit creative block? What do you do to overcome it?

Yeah! I force myself to make something and try not to waste too many materials in the process. Sometimes it may take a few pieces to get the ball rolling.

How much of your own artistic research is conventional vs. unconventional?

I can sit down and try to research something, but just living is inspiration enough. I find travel very inspiring, just being able to see new environments. Usually ideas just pop into my head. For a while, I had a bunch of receipts of notes in my car that were later indecipherable, but if it's a good idea I will remember it later on.

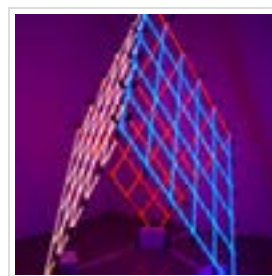
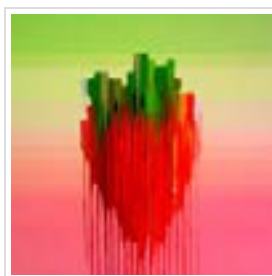
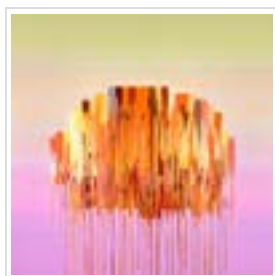


What's next for your practice? Shows, exhibitions, collaborations, etc? What are you working on?

I'm going to be in a group show with Hinge Gallery in Indiana in August.

If you could collaborate with any artist, who would you pick?

I'd say James Turrell and Robert Irwin I'd both like to have a conversation with as much as collaborate. Also collaborating with local artists seems just as fun.



by **Anna Russett**

Anna Russett is a Chicago-based artist and news editor hailing from Fort Wayne, Indiana. She attends the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is interested in Photography and New Media. Her work is constantly evolving by the nature of the developing social landscape that flourishes online. Her journey in online work is a never-ending anthropologic march with technology and the social use of it. Almost against her will, she stays plugged in and has already welcomed the ceaselessness that enables her work to exist.