

# MAGIC TRICKS

THE PAINTINGS OF  
JAIMIE BRETT  
TREADWELL





by Jeff Min

It's uncanny just how much our behavior mimics nature—how our actions can be swayed by things like the sun and the moon, the rotation of the earth, and its many seasons. Our moods, for instance, fluctuate like weather patterns, swirling around in extraordinary ways, leaving lasting impressions long after they've passed.

Jaime Brett Treadwell's work is an example of this strange ecology. He merges design, color theory, and pop culture into one magnificent carnival full of wildly eccentric images. He pulls from techniques such as sculpture, collage, and of course painting to help bring his vision to life. If there doesn't appear to be any rhyme or reason, then good, because that's half the fun.

"My earlier work presents various narratives that relate to class, social economics, identity, etc.," says Treadwell. "My new work is less literal and ventures more in the non-narrative world. However, they aren't completely non-objective; they are still very much based in reality."

The interplay between reality and non-reality is what makes Treadwell's pieces so entertaining. He does an extensive amount of work behind the scenes to make the unnatural look natural, creating ambiguity and poking fun every step of the way—outlandish, but in a sophisticated manner.

"Chocolate Mint Pitt" for instance. It's an absurd image that could just as easily find itself on the cover of *Mad Magazine* as it could hanging up in a gallery. "I always thought the reclining male nude as a bit odd and funny," says Treadwell. "Because they appear so serious while their junk is just presented there."

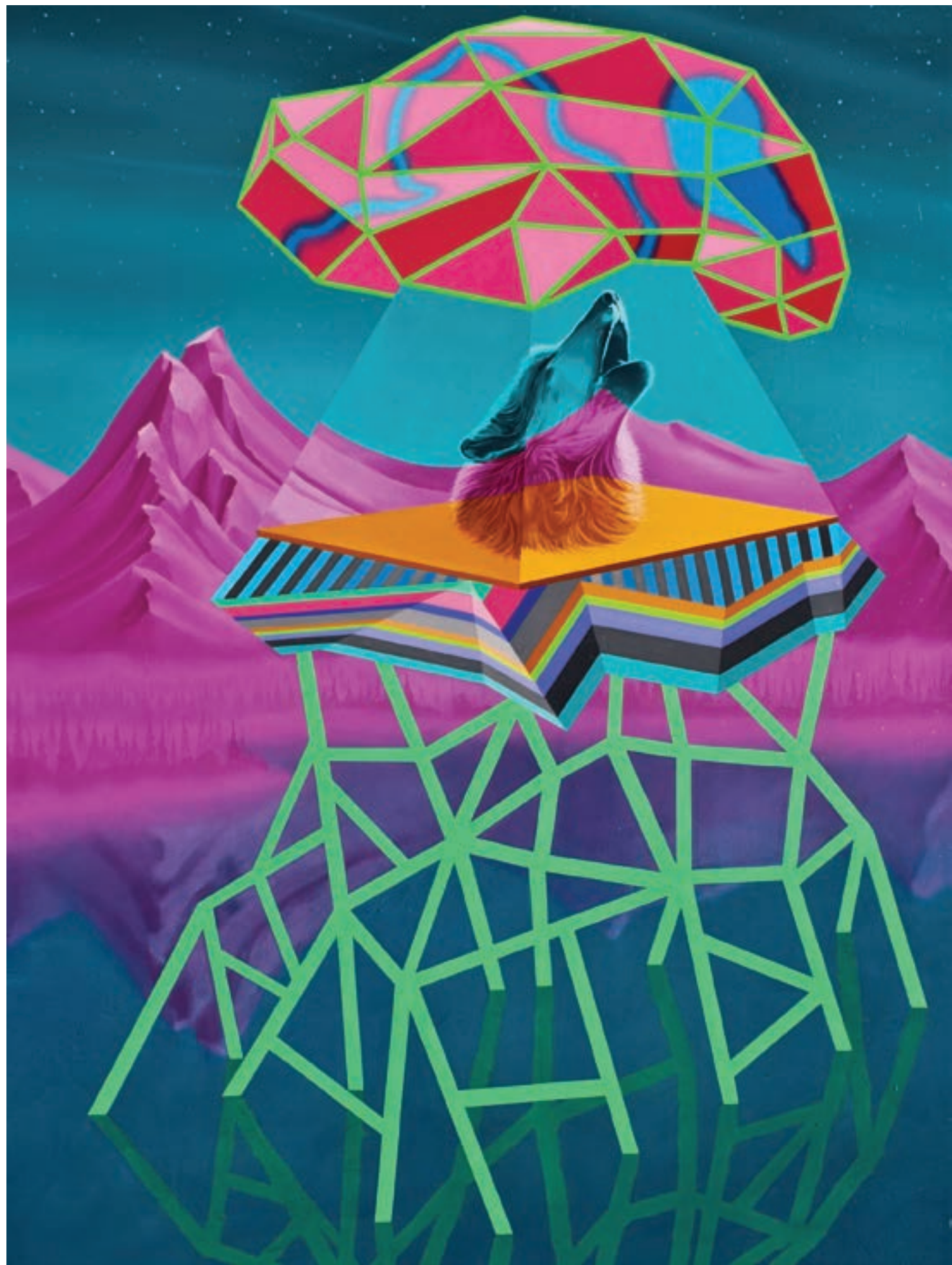
If it seems ridiculous it's because it *is* ridiculous, but what makes the images resonate with such potency is Treadwell's process, which includes an acrylic wash, the accumulating of countless images via the web, gradients, geometric planes, and multiple layers of paint and varnish—grueling work that upon first glance goes almost unnoticed. In other words, there is method to the madness.

"What I find most valuable about [his] compositions are the line work and detail," says Jennifer Darland, director of Mirus Gallery where Treadwell's show *Trick Magic* was recently exhibited. "I've been asked several times by viewers if he uses spray paint due to the precision in his gradation technique, which is done with oils by hand."

OPPOSITE: "Jeff Koons Lives Here", 48" x 30"

ABOVE: "Barnacle", 44" x 44"

FOLLOWING: (L-R): "How Things Were Made", 24" x 30"  
"God, Gold and Guns", 48 x 30"



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The painstaking process in which Treadwell constructs his pieces create a magical wonderment, a mood that gives atmosphere to his worlds. "High Art" is a fine example of what Treadwell is aiming for. Everything is wonderfully out of place—the purple mountain and magenta lake and the odd pyramid with its retro style gradients. The occupants include a centaur with wings and a voluptuous woman. Both are entangled within each other, lost in pure ecstasy—the cover of your next favorite sci-fi romance novel.

"In the end I want my paintings to embody a sense of beauty in a corny magical way," says Treadwell. "Which may be the reason I often use kitschy elements such as smoky fog, monochrome landscapes, palm trees, the phoenix symbol, the lone wolf, pop culture icons, things that can be found on a drug store t-shirt."

Low brow art is a strong element in Treadwell's work. It adds a level of humor that speaks to his personality like laughing at a funeral or belching in a five star restaurant. His childlike approach breaks conformity in subtle ways, using laughter to gently guide the experience. It's bargain bin imagery that helps, of all things, ground you.

"As a child I remember a fascination with these low culture icons," says Treadwell. "And during art school I learned the difference between high and low forms of art. In retrospect, I find the common denominator in my work is taking an ordinary cultural component or icon and re-presenting it as high culture. Maybe it's my way of being oppositional because I can't seem to knock it off."

Brett's most recent show *Trick Magic* is an extension of his humorous hand, one that has him pulling images from his environment like a rabbit from a magician's hat.

"Most of the paintings employ some form of visual deception or illusion—challenging the viewer's sense of reality—which I imagine to be similar objectives for a magician," says Treadwell of his show. "So, I titled the show *Trick Magic*. I thought the title embodied both a literal and a non-literal translation of the work, which mirrored the reality vs. non-reality emphasis throughout the paintings."

The fact that there is no grand statement being made other than exploring one's own imagination is a statement within itself. Treadwell scours the internet like a modern-day Neil Armstrong looking for the next alien world to explore. Each piece is like washing up on the shores of a new planet where the familiar is placed in unfamiliar scenarios—an ecology that carves out new ways for the viewer to think and feel, sensations that enliven and amuse.

"Things are in a good place with my work and I don't want to lose momentum," says Treadwell when asked what the next few months will bring. "I am very excited about the direction of my paintings and I can't wait to get back into the studio. What's next? I'm just as curious."

OPPOSITE: "The Funeral", 48" x 48"

