

CULTURED

When Cities Sleep: Jesse Wine at SculptureCenter

By Callan Malone, March 30, 2020



Jesse Wine's "You Have A New Memory," 2018. Photo Credit: Dario Lasagni

Though it's since moved to a studio in Sunset Park, sculptor Jesse Wine's former workplace sat mere feet from Brooklyn's famed sandwich shop Defonte's. The British artist watched and listened, not always willingly, as trucks stopped in front of the metal roll door of his studio in Red Hook, sometimes for hours, idling as their drivers grabbed a sandwich across the street and waited for whatever needed to be loaded and unloaded. It was August of 2018 when Wine started recording videos of the idling trucks. What now comprises 200GB of footage became the jumping off point, as well as the soundtrack, for his show "Imperfect List," slated to open at SculptureCenter come spring.

The idea of idling against the backdrop of a city that seems to never stop was only the beginning for the NY transplant, as he dove into a treasure trove of questions examining how we engage with the city around us. Idling functions as the in-between of motion and stasis. “Imperfect List” will feature a collection of sleeping heads; the fronts indicate a person in deep sleep while the cavernous backsides display the capitalization of sleep and interrupted dreamspace caused by the ever-increasing call for productivity.

It is, of course, impossible to discuss New York at the moment without recognizing the eerie calm that has washed over its streets while inside hospitals, chaos ensues. Though Wine could not have predicted that his show would coincide with a global pandemic, his work becomes all the more important. Given the circumstances, we were unable to discuss his show in person and settled on a virtual walking tour of New York, as the sculptor described to me, over the phone, how each idea for the show was formed.



Jesse Wine's "The Enigma Of A Night (With Omg)," 2018. Photo Credit: Dario Lasagni

We discuss 432 Park Avenue and various other monumentally sized buildings, as well as the ever-changing Brooklyn waterfront that lines the East River with floor-to-ceiling, window-clad high rises. “New York is lauded as being a vertical city,” Wine explains. “In reality, very few people experience life from these towers.” In addition to the in-between state of idling, Wine is also interested in the sale and use of air rights: the world of real estate that deals with the air above an owned property. A NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority) housing project visible from the BQE, just south of Williamsburg, had its air rights sold by the city to a private developer, sparking Wine’s interest in air rights as yet another tactic in maintaining the city’s ever-growing wealth and quality of life disparity. The views and space allowed to the buildings’ inhabitants would soon be compromised, due to circumstances entirely out of their control. The sale of air rights, which are not publicly posted, go largely unnoticed then and as skyscrapers are thrown up quickly and quietly by private developers, the landscape of the city changes again, before we’ve even noticed.

With “Imperfect List,” Wine explores the varying impacts urban life has on humans, both in mind and body.