

## ULTIMATE AMERICAN ARTIST SAM FALLS ON THE WONDER OF NATURE

i-D visits the studio of California artist Sam Falls, whose new show featuring video, sound, sculpture, and a plant-filled 1984 Ford Ranger opens this week at Ballroom Marfa in Texas.

By Jane Helpert — March 12, 2015



Bi-coastal artist Sam Falls has trekked around the world, from Finland to Joshua Tree, making large-scale paintings, hyper-color photographs, and interactive public installations. His work is inspired by the beauty, unpredictability, and ferocity of nature, and attempts to, as he says, “traverse issues of abstraction and representation in a meaningful way.” With his shoulder-length brown hair and paper-thin paint-splotted t-shirt, the sun-soaked Reed College graduate walks us through his sprawling Glendale, California studio, and the methodical madness of his art practice.

Growing up in Vermont, the 45th largest state and the only one with the distinction of having zero buildings taller than 124 feet, Sam Falls spent hours playing with his friends in the rain and sun, foraging objects that had

been rusted and faded. All that time spent outdoors made the elements a crucial theme and principal tool in his work. His nature-focused oeuvre began as an experiment around leaving two-by-four lumber on dyed fabric out in the blazing California sun for eight months (“I had this dark strip where the 2X4 was, and I was like ‘oh yea, that’s exactly what I thought would happen’”). In Falls’ work, the hand of nature is not only visible, but even more significant than that of the artist.

For a series of pastel-hued rain paintings exhibited last year at Hannah Hoffman Gallery in Los Angeles, Sam gathered foliage from locations including Venice and New York and randomly sprinkled them with pigment on canvas and left them out in the rain. “Color is a descriptive tool rather than an emotive or



aesthetic tool. I don't make the decisions on what colors go well together, I put them down randomly," he explains of this systematic process.

While Sam's vibrant work is almost always visually pleasing, with its rich splatters and pastel swirls, he believes that its most important aspect is how and why something is made. "You end up with something that is tasteful to people, but I don't suppose to own that element. Some people will like that one, and other people will like that one. For me, color is an important description in that it delineates the rain. Whereas if it were all black or all red, you wouldn't see the different movements of the water."

But just because Sam defers to the spontaneity of nature doesn't mean the artist leaves his work vulnerable to chance (although sun-induced imperfections are some of his favorite parts). Quite the contrary. "That's a thing

that a lot of people say and that I get asked a lot about in interviews. But I'll just say that I've spent thirty years outside and five years working in a dark room and with the printers in my studio, so I have a pretty good idea of what's going to happen now." And with each of these findings, Sam moves on to predict and choreograph another one of nature's powerful phenomena.

Art critics have written extensively about this explorational use of methods and media, grouping Sam with other genre-blurring artists of his artistically ADD generation. But for Sam, the need to "progress through mediums rather than spinning in circles" is a no-brainer. "It would be like if after David Foster Wallace everyone wanted to go back to writing like Faulkner," he says, a little bewildered. "It should use everything that David Foster Wallace made possible. All these people have worked through things, not for you to repeat their steps, but to take advantage of the process."

Sam's latest completed thought process will be on view at Ballroom Marfa in West Texas on March 13th, showcasing work created during his July 2014 residency in the remote artist community. It's a multi-disciplinary exhibition involving video, sound, sculpture, and a plant-filled 1984 Ford Ranger, that considers the legacy of Donald Judd and his seminal outdoor work with Marfa's Chinati Foundation. Across the globe in Turin, Italy, Falls will also open a show at Galleria Franco Noero on March 22nd. If it seems like a lot for one man in his early thirties, then perhaps it's fitting to close with this line from our creative Olympian: "There is an athleticism to art."

i-D

