



Collective Memory *MEETS THE* Artist's Brush

TRAVIS WALKER's compositions transport viewers directly into scenes that feel like both personal memory and part of the shared lexicon of film.

BY Jenn Rein

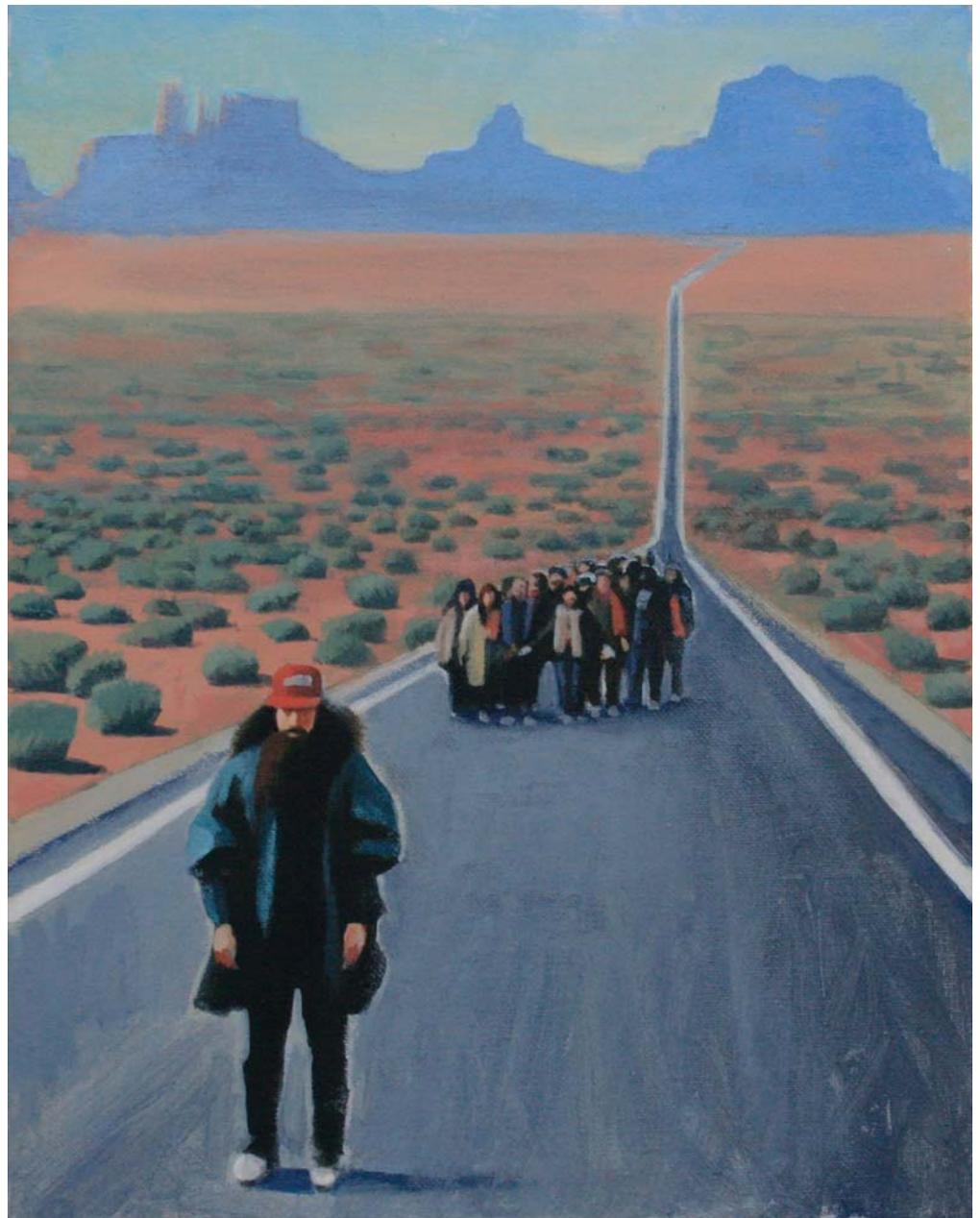


ABOVE
Learning to Fly
(acrylic on canvas,
18x36)

RIGHT
No More Running
(acrylic on canvas,
40x30)

“When you think about what you have to do to stand out as a creative, you have to consider your whole life path,” says artist Travis Walker. He gives revelatory nods to his own path by acknowledging the inspirations that have fed him through the years. Now 45, his painter’s eye still absorbs and dissects the world before him. “If I’m going to take a chance, it’s going to be on theme,” he says. “I always hope to broaden who I am as a painter, thematically.”

As a modernist, Walker makes choices in the familiar theme of cinema. The car depicted sailing off a cliff in *Learning To Fly* (opposite) is a nod to the movie *Thelma & Louise*; a couple executing an aquatic dance move in *Lady of the Lake* (page 66) brings to mind scenes from *Dirty Dancing*; and in *No More Running* (below), the man standing in the road in Monument Valley with a crowd behind him evokes *Forrest Gump*. Once the familiar is taken in and the theme identified, there’s another thread that emerges in this artist’s work—a fascination with the outdoors.



A resident of Freedom, Wyo., Walker lives not far from the thriving art scene in Jackson Hole. A mecca for plein air painters, this mountain hamlet has inspired his creativity for more than 20 years. Altamira Fine Art, the gallery that represents his work, holds within an artistic accounting of the imagery that's characteristic to this community. Subjects in wildlife abound, as do mountain landscapes.

Walker's art stands out here as a unique and refreshing take on the West, and his love of nature doesn't strictly confine him to outdoor scenes in cinema. With *It's All One* (opposite, bottom), we gaze upon a grove of aspen trees, a common scene found in the surrounding region. When depicted with this artist's brush, however, we see a balance of soft color and light and a willingness to expand the palette. Beyond the trees and lush grass that define the foreground, the steadfast beauty of alpenglow decorates a distant hillside.

Brushing Up on Influences

As a student at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture, in Philadelphia, Walker came to know his own style through the influences of such artists as Max Beckman (1884–1950), Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975) and Jasper Johns (1930–), among others. It was his discovery of Edward Hopper (1882–1967), however, that galvanized Walker's approach to the canvas. The breakthrough occurred just prior to earning his bachelor's degree. "That's when I really started to see," says Walker. He goes on to explain, "I love music and I listen to a lot of material about how musicians are inspired and what they go through to compose. I'm really into the layering of things. I got into trying to layer my inspirations—enjoying what Hopper is doing over here with X, then maybe trying to see what Beckman is doing with Y."





CLOCKWISE FROM
OPPOSITE
Lady of the Lake (oil
on canvas, 30x40)

Mead Ranch Sky (oil
on canvas, 48x60)

It's All One (acrylic
on canvas, 38x52)





The artist still finds himself seeing in “Hopper-vision,” as he calls it. “Old timers sitting on a porch in blue jeans, their caps squared ... the light hits them in a way that makes you feel like you’re staring at a scene from 100 years ago,” he muses.

Walker’s pieces are a part of the contemporary art scene in Jackson Hole, but his modernist approach is also aligned with post-Impressionism. Nature is always present. The outdoors is an underlying theme, but his personal take just happens to include a cinematic moment. With *Rico’s World* (opposite), a piece that depicts golden prairie grass set against a strip of brilliant blue sky, one cannot help but smile at the orange camper van with pink curtains set squarely in the middle of the canvas where Uncle Rico from the cult classic *Napoleon Dynamite* practices diligently with his football.

Community, in the Hands of an Artist

A move in 2002 brought Walker to Jackson Hole, and upon arrival, he started working for the Jackson Hole Art Association. He admits that he was not interested in nonprofit work at the start of his term there, but what came next was a wholly dedicated effort meant to support the struggling artist.

He founded Teton Artlab in 2008 with fellow artist Tristan Greszko. “We started the Artlab through frustration, mostly,” Walker says. In a neighborhood where property rates are unapproachable for those trying to make

it on an artist’s living, Teton Artlab emerged as an art collective that provided both studio space and a means for artistic growth. After only two years, this endeavor secured its nonprofit status.

Teton Artlab has given a voice to some of the best artists in the Jackson Hole area and has hosted numerous events in order to draw attention to multidisciplinary arts. Walker’s love of music is represented here, as is work in fashion, printmaking, ceramics and hot glass demonstrations.

Through the Uncommon Art Residency, Teton Artlab partners with Jackson’s Anvil Hotel and the Art Association of Jackson Hole to bring artists into the community who are willing to demonstrate their process and educate the public on what feeds their passion. “Every dollar we make goes to an artist and the life that has to be sustained around art,” says Walker.

Sustaining Creativity at Home

Walker adopted the Jackson Hole region as his home after a childhood spent as a “military brat.” If asked where he’s from, he shifts into conversation about the feeling of home and how he has found his place. A father of two, he’s proud to raise his children in a fixed location so near to the wilds of nature.

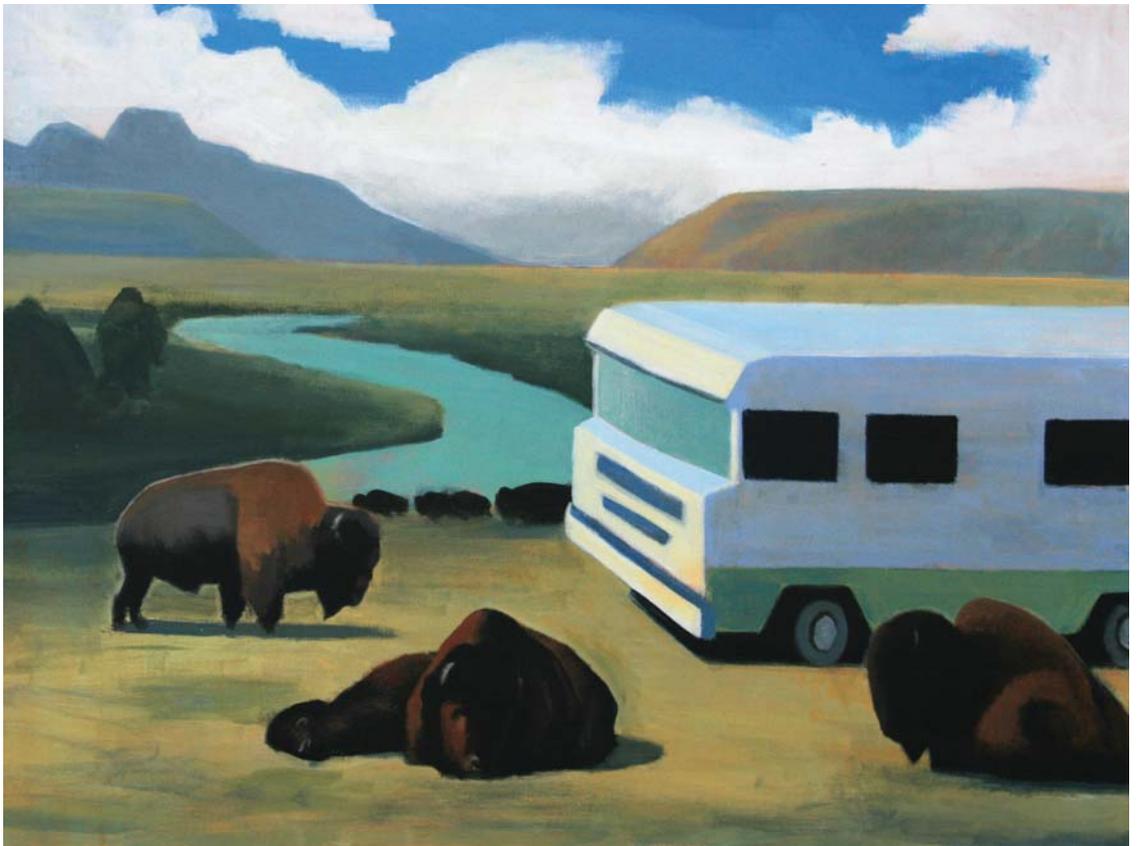
The transitory lifestyle of Walker’s childhood took him, at one time, to the Yokota Air Base, in Tokyo, which sparked his interest in anything Japanese. This base is still considered an integral piece of the United States Air



CLOCKWISE
FROM ABOVE
Lockhart
Haybales
(acrylic on
canvas, 18x36)

Rico's World
(oil on canvas,
48x60)

The Stand
(acrylic on
canvas, 48x60)



“If I’m going to take a chance, it’s going to be on theme. I always hope to broaden who I am as a painter, thematically.”

—TRAVIS WALKER

OPPOSITE
Ye Old Faithful (oil
on canvas, 20x30)

BELOW
A Lone Cowboy (oil
on canvas, 30x40)



Force’s presence in Asia, and currently houses more than 14,000 personnel. “There’s a struggle with identity and fitting in among military brats,” he says. “The kids are coping at a level that the military members don’t understand.”

In her 1991 book, *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*, author Mary Edwards Wertsch explains that “nomad” is not an accurate term for children of the military, since a true nomad moves within an entire community. “American military children, by contrast,” she writes, “do not have kinship networks to anchor them. The constant change is not balanced by social stability. For the military brat, each time the family moves, the world dissolves and is swept away.”

One of Wertsch’s interview subjects calls out the requirement for order within this lifestyle. “The emphasis in the military is on discipline and conformity. On what you see. There is no emphasis on interiors.” The fact that Walker emerged from this environment as an artist speaks to his own powerful coping mechanisms, anchored in creativity and imagination.

Walker’s obsessive attention to Japanese culture fed this mechanism. This included a fascination with manga, architecture and even the Toyota brand. He nurtured a love of drawing from an early age and found himself living a dream when he landed a job in a comic book shop decades ago. “I couldn’t believe my luck,” he says.



Committed to Creative Growth

As it stands, Walker's evolution as an artist has come from an absorption of both nature and popular culture. He's able to address these seemingly disparate themes while still embracing the ebb and flow of artistic growth. "Many years ago, I got hooked on *The Artist's Way*," he explains. This book by Julia Cameron has served as a reference for many creatives, shaping the maker lifestyle as one that can be rich and fulfilling if a regular discipline is served.

In his role as an artist, but also as a champion of the artistic lifestyle and its need for personal reflection, Walker traverses the path of his numerous influences by finding a way to pay tribute to what came before while adding his own contemporary twist. He honors the visual arts with both irreverence and respect as he continues to solidify the commitment required to push his own limits. ♣

Jenn Rein is a writer and content producer living in Colorado.



MEET THE ARTIST

Travis Walker (traviswalkeraart.com) was born in Tokyo. With a parent in the Air Force, his itinerant childhood was filled with comic books, science fiction and drawing. After obtaining a B.A. in painting and printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University, the allure of the Western landscape drew the artist to Jackson Hole, Wyo., where he has lived and worked for nearly 20 years, blending contemporary landscape painting with the fictional worlds of his past imaginings. Walker's work is represented at Altamira Fine Art, in Wyoming and Arizona; Visions West Contemporary, in Montana and Colorado; and The Art Spirit Gallery, in Idaho. He's co-founder of the nonprofit Teton Artlab, an Artist In Residence program based in Jackson Hole, and his paintings have been featured in several art magazines.