

JONAS WOOD FACETIMED US TO TALK EXOTIC COFFINS AND THE TIME HE ENDED UP ON LEBRON JAMES'S INSTAGRAM

by Michael McGregor



The Still Life," 2007.

A child painting their own face. Tropical plants. Basketballs. Milk crates. More basketballs. These are just some of the banal exotica that appear in the work of Jonas Wood. By now, you're just as likely to see the Los Angeles-based painter's work on Instagram as you are in a white-walled gallery, a major museum, on the shelf at Dover Street Market, or even on LeBron James's social media. Wood's paintings and prints are hyper-specific tableaux of contemporary life. They ooze nonchalance. They look a bit like the way a stoned philosophy major sounds when spouting oblique references. As references go, it's not far from how Wood sounded himself when he FaceTimed with Interview ahead of his first solo museum show, opening this weekend at the Dallas Museum of Art.

The 42-year-old is just as likely to spout off minute details regarding the composition of Alex Katz paintings as he is to make playful pajama sweatsuits with basketballs on them (which he sold, briefly, at Dover Street Market.) A self-described "artist who likes sports," Wood's output and interests operate according to a stupefying kind of logic. As he told us, "It's all stuff I'm just interested in." Moments after we picked up his FaceTime, Wood proceeded to light a joint and tilt his iPhone upwards, so he could tell us about his fetish for courtside seats, his appreciation for a Ghanaian coffin artist, and that one time he partied with the mysterious fashion icon James Goldstein — all while painting.

MICHAEL MCGREGOR: It's no secret you love the NBA and you love going to Lakers games. You usually sit courtside, right?

JONAS WOOD: Well, I'd like to clarify I'm not sitting fucking courtside. I prefer the elevated seats in the first bowl because of the view. I totally love seeing all the celebrities at the games, zooming in on Jimmy Goldstein. He's this crossover freak for me because he's an art guy, and he's also an NBA guy. I'm not really a fashion guy per se, but he's obviously all three of those things. He has this amazing house, you know, the house from the *The Big Lebowski*,

the Sheats-Goldstein house where fucking Jackie Treehorn draws the fucking little dude with the dick on the pad, and then Lebowksi comes over and traces it, and does the rubbing to figure out if he wrote a secret message, and it's just a dude with a big erection. Have you ever seen the movie I'm talking about?

MCGREGOR: Yes.

WOOD: That's that dude's house! He's giving it to LACMA. He's really cool. I sat next to him at an event one time. He dresses like Prince — like Prince on fucking meth. It's over the top. All the players wanna hang out with him. Supposedly, he has a club at his house.

MCGREGOR: It's a real thing. Club James.

WOOD: He parties, you know? He likes the ladies. He likes the basketball players. He likes the NBA. He's tried to buy some teams. You know what the the coolest thing about sitting courtside is? You get to touch the ball. The ball will come over to you. The referee is there. You just like put out your hand to pass the ball, and they'll fucking pass you the ball. Not during the game, but at half time or before the game. The biggest difference between sitting on the floor and anywhere else is like the difference between being in the men's locker room and not being in the men's locker room. When you sit on the floor you can literally smell all these dudes fucking sweating. It's real.

MCGREGOR: Have you ever had any interactions with players?

WOOD: A guy sitting next to me once was friends with Draymond [Green]. I met Dray. He has giant hands. That's it. I've played poker with a couple of basketball players.

MCGREGOR: It was just announced that Space Jam 2 is in development. If you had creative control, who would you cast in the movie?

WOOD: I have to say I never saw the first Space Jam.

MCGREGOR: Oh.

WOOD: I mean, I know what it is. I'm pretty sure I've seen bits and parts of it, but I didn't really give a shit for some reason?

MCGREGOR: What's up with your basketball sweatsuit project? How'd that end up at Dover Street Market?

WOOD: One of my good friends works at Dover Street, and was like, "You should make more so we can have it in the store, just for fun." It wasn't too serious. I wasn't trying to make money, but they sold a bunch. They said, "Hey, do you want us to keep selling this for more than the two weeks we agreed? I said, "No, I'm psyched to actually be able to keep all this inventory and just like give it to people." I wanted to give it to some basketball players. One of my contacts in the fashion industry worked for Nike a while ago, and he knows the stylists for all these players. He said, "Hey, I can get this stuff in front of them. I can get their exact size, but there's no guarantee that anybody's gonna wear it."

I got the sizes for LeBron [James], Anthony Davis, Kyrie Irving, and Russell Westbrook. I delivered custom suits to them. Four days later, LeBron was making some goofy video with his wife about wearing it. So it went from I just wanna make these fucking hoodies and sweatpants to LeBron wearing them. A couple of weeks later, Anthony Davis wore during a pregame as an undershirt. It was fucking dope.

MCGREGOR: How'd you acquire a basketball-shaped coffin by Paa Joe?

WOOD: Mine's not a coffin.

MCGREGOR: Really?

WOOD: Mine is a Palanquin. Paa Joe is a novelty coffin and palanquin maker. I wanted to get a coffin, but my wife said, "You don't wanna order a coffin, you should order a Palanquin." It's a throne. Mine has a part that pops up the top, and there's a seat inside. It weighs like 600 pounds. While it'd probably take ten dudes to carry it, you're supposed to be walked into your wedding, or funeral, on one. It's part of the tradition in Ghana to celebrate life and also celebrate death. Paa Joe actually does both. He also makes coffins which are fully buried — you don't even get to live with it. He builds this beautiful thing out of wood and you bury it.

I got this one custom made for me. It's just a big throne sculpture. It's got such a great vibe in my studio.. It feels good to have a giant basketball in my studio with some plants. It feels like it's meant to be, you know? I'm glad it's not a coffin, too.