

PART I

FRANKLIN EVANS

Interview by Leda Cempellin*

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On March 11, 2025, I interviewed via Zoom Franklin Evans, whose work I saw a few weeks prior in a solo exhibition at the Miles McEnery Gallery in Chelsea. This year, Evans' work was included in the group show *20 Years in Milan* at the Wizard Gallery and was also present in *Miart* in Milan. His work has been reviewed in major art magazine, including *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Hyperallergic*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Flash Art*, as well as major newspapers like the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*. This interview has been extensively edited for clarity and brevity purposes.

Can we give some information on your educational background to the readers of *Juliet*? Sure. I grew up in Nevada and excelled in math but wasn't exposed to much art; sports were our culture. At Stanford in California, I studied math-related subjects and earned an economics degree. During my junior year, I took a drawing class and discovered my passion for art. It was the first subject where I didn't care about grades; I just wanted to learn. For the last two years at Stanford, I focused on studio classes and art history. I built my portfolio to attend graduate school at the University of Iowa, where I studied painting. I felt committed to becoming an artist and was drawn to New York's urban environment and dense art scene. It took about ten years to find my footing. During that time, I began as a temp in a bank. Due to my economics degree, I eventually became a financial analyst. The derivatives subsidiary in NYC of a Japanese parent bank sent me to Columbia Business School, and when the operation closed, I went full-time into my studio. My five years working in finance illuminated the social engagement necessary to navigate the art community. Earlier I naively thought people would come to my studio even without inviting them, without getting to know the community, so it took a little while. I started teaching in 2017 at Cooper Union, where they were interested in a painter who works in the expanded field. I also paint traditionally, inspired by old masters like Titian, using many layers and glazing that are a flurry of information or paint, which cohere into some readable space or image.

What is your relationship with the history of art? I make large painting installations, most recently presenting one at the MAXXI Museum in Rome called *perpetualstudio*. This installation, part of the "What a Wonderful World" show, showcases the density of the context for my work, the references, and systems I use. The floor features geometries pointing to clusters of discrete information, sometimes related to the studio, sometimes as independent projects. In this installation, my most comprehensive to date, I included elements from at least twenty prior projects over the past twenty years, mostly from the US and also several from Italy. Each fragment from the past was represented alongside new elements created for the installation. This approach highlights my interest in the narrative extending beyond the limits of a collection of information in an object. The floor's laminations, especially the gridded area, represent my timeline of art history relevant to my practice, marked with dates.

Is it like a museum without walls? The grid on the floor, right? It's basically a reproduction of artworks from your timeline. The walls are your work, but the floor is a sort of artistic reference. It's not your work; it's an illustration of masterpieces. Yes, Malraux's imaginary museum, but also as an illustration of my specific projects in that timeline. It's a collection of information relevant to my work, not just the history of art, but how art history influences my work.

For example, artists like Barry Le Va or Larry Poons worked on the floor, which reflects how I start my paintings—stapled to the floor, gessoed, and painted. Another important reference is Duchamp. When I started this work, I always thought I would show a documentation image of the collection of all that I've made before. It is similar to Duchamp's *La Boîte-en-valise*, which includes miniatures of all the things he'd made up to that point.

Help me understand. On the floor, there are photographs reproducing artists or details you've looked at for your work, along with reproductions of details from your artworks, right? Yes, laid out in a linear timeline. For example, the back left corner near the wall features Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, which I consider a painting installation. It's like a surround painting. I feel a kinship to that type of work, so it's one of the starting images. There are also biographical elements, like images of the Nevada landscape I grew up around, and works by Lewis Baltz, a photographer who captured the desert west in the 1970s and 1980s. His *Shadow Mountain* series, depicting new housing construction in Nevada, was basically my backyard. These landscapes have a lasting impact, even after leaving them. I left Nevada in 1985 to attend college in California. This history plays a significant role in my work, inspiring and shaping it. This is part of the "perpetual studio" concept. Additionally, I'm fond of Daniel Buren's essay "The Function of the Studio" written in 1971, where he discusses the studio as a place for art to only be itself, but there is a paradox: if art never leaves the studio, it dies; when it leaves the studio, it dies also because it loses the context of the studio. My *perpetualstudio* is this chance to present my own studio space as an art piece to the public.

Okay, but when it leaves the original context, it revives in the new context of an exhibition, museum, or gallery, creating new stories, right? Yes, absolutely. In the early 1970s, Buren decided he could no longer work in a studio and had to work with the site because the site was so powerful. I know my work better than anybody because I've lived with it so long, but my work gains new life when the public sees something from a different perspective. This interaction helps me think about and build my work, creating a wonderful, optimistic loop. That's the generosity of being able to exhibit and have viewers.

Franklin Evans' work can be found in his website: <https://www.franklinevans.com/>

He is represented by Miles McEnery Gallery: <https://www.mile-smcenery.com/artists/franklin-evans>

My gratitude to Zoe Orr and Alissa Schoenfeld.

Franklin Evans, "*perpetualstudio*" 2022. 1,000 square feet installation, 18 feet high. Acrylic on canvas, paper, tape, and wall; pigment prints on paper and silk; 'painted tapescreens', laminated pigment prints, and Plexiglas. Commissioned by MAXXI - National Museum of XXI Century Art in Rome. Photo by Antonio Maniscalco, courtesy of MAXXI Museum, Rome and Wizard Gallery, Milan

