



## Wil Aballe Art Projects: After I Shed My Skin

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Struck by the closing of several galleries in Vancouver and inspired by the success of other non-traditional art spaces, Wil Aballe has recently opened his eponymous Wil Aballe Art Projects with an inaugural exhibition of works by Sean Weisgerber. This collector-turned-gallerist, who admits to having been “obsessed” while collecting, packed up the majority of his personal belongings and cleared his walls to show art in his apartment, becoming a proto example of the possibility of living with critical, not-merely-decorative work on a day-to-day basis. We recently visited WAAP and were very impressed by Sean Weisgerber’s engaging installation celebrating WAAP’s unconventional space, as well as Wil’s ambitious programming. We asked Wil a few questions about his first show and new venture and he very happily obliged.



Installation view of Sean Weisgerber: After I Shed My Skin at Wil Aballe Art Projects. Photo: Dennis Ha

**Here and Elsewhere:** What inspired you to open Wil Aballe Art Projects? How is your space different from a more traditional commercial gallery venture?

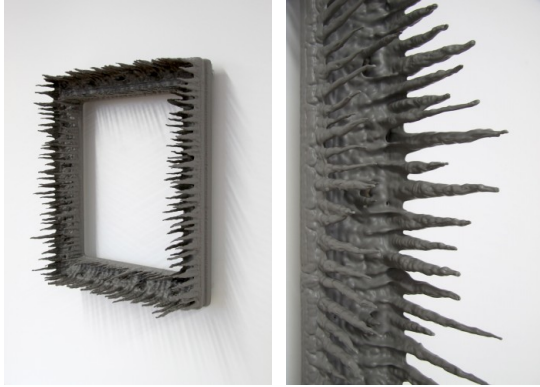
**Wil Aballe:** Wil Aballe Art Projects, or WAAP, was an idea that came to me about 2 years ago in response to so many gallery spaces closing in Vancouver. Since that time, LES, Jeffrey Boone, Blanket, Buschlen Mowatt and Diane Farris

have shuttered. It felt necessary to open a space to show artists whose work would otherwise not be seen. Vancouver is a city full of amazing artists, and there are not enough exhibition spaces. I looked at my private space, and thought, the walls are good – this could work. The whole idea really fell into place last summer when I organized 3 shows at Quinary Art Projects, a pop-up space by Wesley Yuen that was located in Yaletown. I enjoyed the process of working with those artists and thought then that it was time to revisit my idea from a couple of years back with my own commercial gallery venture.



Installation view of Sean Weisgerber: After I Shed My Skin at Wil Aballe Art Projects. Photo: Dennis Ha

WAAP is not the same as other commercial galleries because it isn't a traditional white cube that is an enclosed entity made purely for art exhibition. It is also my home, and needs to function as such and contain what I need on a day-to-day basis. This poses significant constraints on the artists who I am exhibiting, but may also present significant opportunities. Right from the get-go, I didn't want the art to be limited or diminished by the space and its context. If I do my job right, I hope that WAAP's strength will be its ability to demonstrate to people that it's feasible to live with challenging, critical art within your own domestic space. There are many successful examples of apartment galleries. For instance, Anthony Meier in San Fran, ACME in LA, Daniel Buchholz in Berlin and Emmanuel Perrotin in Paris all started out as apartment galleries. Even Gagosian's first New York outpost was located in his own Soho loft residence in the 70s. In town, I've seen Yactac and The Apartment function very strongly as critical art exhibition spaces, so I was encouraged by these precedents in Vancouver.



Installation view of AFTER I WAS DROPPED, acrylic on discarded wool stretcher, 12 x 8 x 15 inches  
Sean Weisgerber: After I Shed My Skin at Wil Aballe Art Projects. Photo: Sean Weisgerber

**HE:** We really enjoyed your inaugural show of Sean Weisgerber's work. How did you come across Sean's work and what interested you about it?

**WA:** I came across Sean initially through my artist friend, Matthew Brown, who lived with him on the East Side. A year later, he started a year-long project space called 304 Days on Columbia at Pender which was instrumental in showcasing the work of some exciting young artists in the city at the time. That space certainly fulfilled a purpose and carved a niche. But what was surprising to me was that as well-known as Sean was through his curatorial projects, his work was little-known. So I asked him to show me his work towards the end of his project. At the time, he was making these incredibly precise, flawless, hard-edged abstract paintings. I was very impressed. When I decided I would open WAAP, Sean was one of the first artists I thought about. By the time we were discussing the show, he had gone off on a totally different direction, which to me was very exciting. Gone were the precisely made abstract paintings, and now, in their place, were interesting experimentations. We were able to showcase highlights from two different current bodies of work in the show, but there are others that I'm aware of in his studio in Saskatoon. He's a very exciting artist with significant potential and wild ideas.



Installation view of Sean Weisgerber: After I Shed My Skin at Wil Aballe Art Projects. Photo: Dennis Ha

**HE:** What does the title for the show, *After I Shed My Skin*, refer to?

**WA:** It's a mysterious, poetic title. I believe the title refers to him relinquishing the precise execution of his previous paintings. Snakes shed their skin to renew, much like the allegory of the phoenix rising, resulting in a rebirth. When you look at the new work, the constructs, shapes and abstractions are the same as before, but the paintings are now all process-based. This is a significant shift for the artist, even though he is still young. Visually, as well, the paintings literally look like they are shedding their skin. The drip paintings are tactile and look like they are in the process of metamorphosis. Surfaces look like they are melting, morphing, reshaping. It is also the title of the focal point of the show, the wall painting, which looks like a spray of the full colour spectrum disintegrating into the air.



Installation view of Sean Weisgerber: *After I Shed My Skin* at Wil Aballe Art Projects. Photo: Dennis Ha

**HE:** Sean's works sit somewhere between painting, sculpture, and installation. Can you tell us a bit about the process by which he created his drip paintings?

**WA:** The process is a mechanical, semi-industrial process, where the paintings are dipped and hung to dry with heavy chains, causing the paint to drip and eventually freeze in mid-air drawn by and resisting gravity. He arrived at the process by experimenting with different types of paint and different media for support. For instance, the show features works on burlap, hospital wool and found frames. It's a process of trial and error, where every piece brings up five ideas that spawn one or two viable variations to the type of painting created. The process is driven by accidents and randomness, much like life, and the decision of what should stay, because it is interesting, is made by the artist after the works are created, involving a critical editing process.

The paintings certainly have a sculptural, tactile quality. They can sit between media depending on how they are staged or configured in a space. The installation purposely gave the paintings a certain theatrical quality, creating a visceral tension between viewer and object. *After I Shed My Skin*, the abstract

wall painting, for instance, was done to a scale that evokes a landscape. In fact the artist Michael Morris likened the abstract form to that of a sundog, which is an atmospheric phenomena that creates a luminous halo on either side of the sun. One painting titled Linger, which a friend has nicknamed “the Iron Maiden”, looks dangerous and menacing hanging above the bed where I sleep, with its spikes pointing downward.



Installation view of AFTER I SHED MY SKIN, oil on drywall, 72 x 108 inches  
Sean Weisgerber: After I Shed My Skin at Wil Aballe Art Projects.  
Photo: Dennis Ha

**HE:** The installation makes very specific use of your space – how did you and Sean work to integrate the installation with the architecture?

**WA:** Sean felt that since the work is contextualized in an apartment setting, we could try to hide or confuse that fact, but that it would be better to play with that aspect head on. The wall painting illustrates and hints at the process of creation within the studio, as does the painting hanging above the bed from chains. Windows that revealed my incredible views, which, in my opinion, are the best Vancouver views from any apartment that I’ve personally seen, were in such direct competition to the work that Sean decided to block the windows instead of having his work compete with the view. He applied commercial white vinyl squares to the panes reducing the view so that it can only be seen through his installation.

The installation over the bed is both antagonistic and comical, and has been subject to various interpretations by viewers that range from the fetishistic to the violent. It is possibly neither of those, and more likely in response to Sean’s desire to move away from the traditional way of viewing painting, on a wall. While in storage at his Saskatoon studio, this painting was rigged and hung above a chair, and while he sat in it, Sean discovered that he liked the tension created by the art hovering above him. He decided that it would be novel to impose the work and its aesthetics on me and my space in a similar way, lingering above where I sleep. The artist liked that the only way to see the painting properly is to get on the bed, and in turn, getting in bed with me as the dealer, something that he considered a humorous notion.



Installation view of LINGER, acrylic on hospital wool, 24 x 8 x 30 inches  
Sean Weisgerber: After I Shed My Skin at Wil Aballe Art Projects. Photo: Dennis Ha

Moving forward, WAAP's exhibitions will continue to play with the context of the domestic space. For example, one spring show will feature a drawing directly on the wall, and a stenciled wall, typically done outside, will be created within my living room and another will feature an edible sculpture created within my kitchen.

**HE:** What future shows do you have lined up for WAAP?

**WA:** WAAP will have shows every 4-6 weeks. Next up is Toronto-based painter Matthew Brown, followed by a show featuring the works of Natasha McHardy and VIVA Award winner Marina Roy. I've planned shows with CASV Award winner Nicole Ondre and recent ECUAD grad Patricia Huijnen, as well as Toronto-based artist Niall McLelland and interactive new media artist Myron Campbell. WAAP, which is driven in part by a mandate to develop new collectors in Vancouver, will also be launching editions, starting with Sean Weisgerber's oil on mineral paper studies, as well as prints by famed New York-based artists Aurel Schmidt and Jeff Ladouceur with many more to come! The editions are priced at around 1/10th or less of the average price of the artist's work, allowing people the experience of living with art of high calibre, if they have not done so before, which is one of the great joys of my life.

**HE:** Congratulations on your inaugural show and exciting new venture!