

HYPERALLERGIC

ARTICLES

A Handstand in Bushwick

by Katarína Hybenová on February 22, 2012



Paul D'Agostino does a handstand at Norte Maar. (All photos by the author for Hyperallergic, except where stated otherwise.)

Handstand. That is just another of the items on the long list of the things Paul D'Agostino excels at doing. As a Bushwick resident since 2007, D'Agostino has actively worked to shape the art scene in the neighborhood through his countless activities. Bushwick-based nonprofit [Norte Maar](#) is currently presenting a solo show of Paul D'Agostino's work, titled *Appearance Adrift in the Garden*, and I took the opportunity to talk to the man about his art and life.



Paul D'Agostino, "Future Perfect VII" (2012) (photo courtesy Norte Maar)

Beginnings

"She had at least a dozen careers, and was very skilled in crafts," says D'Agostino, who grew up in hurricane-prone Virginia Beach, about his late grandmother. He credits her with passing her talents onto him and his two sisters, who are also artists. D'Agostino attended a program for gifted children with a special focus on the arts, and by the time he was 18, he had spent countless hours in a studio and worked in various media. To everyone's surprise, this straight A student hadn't intended on going to college at all. He used to be a passionate skateboarder who dreamed about a professional skateboarding career in California. However, during his senior year he suffered a serious injury, which meant he had to ignore the prospect of serious skateboarding for good and he opted for college in the end.

After high school, D'Agostino felt that he could still pursue art on his own while branching out into other disciplines as well, which led to studying international relations and languages. However, art has never stopped being his passion.



Paul D'Agostino at Norte Maar.

D'Agostino completed his PhD in Italian literature by the time he was 27. "I had developed really good study habits in high school, because back then I knew my parents wouldn't let me spend as much time skateboarding if I didn't have good grades," he says.

In the living room of his shared Bushwick loft, Paul has been operating [Centotto](#), an apartment gallery where he has curated over 20 art shows. D'Agostino smiles when recalling the first show he put up at Centotto on the occasion of the 2008 Bushwick Open Studios. "500 people came in during the weekend," he says.



Paul D'Agostino: Appearance Adrift in the Garden 1-4 (2011)

In the Garden

Appearance Adrift in the Garden features Paul D'Agostino's recent collage works, sets of serialized monoprints and a recently released chapbook of prose and poetry, *Bodies, Voids and a Tale of Seas*, which features some of his original writings in German, Italian, French, Spanish and English. As a literary component to the show, Norte Maar, which like Centotto operates in its director's apartment, presented a reading by the artist from his collection last Sunday afternoon.



The piece reads: "Minor disasters ... at a French canal ... keep boredom at bay."

The symbiosis of text and images is essential to D'Agostino's work. A phrase, poem or a piece of reading often ignites the impulse to create, and similarly a piece of art can stimulate D'Agostino to start the writing process. The poem "Likeness/Abbild" illustrates how D'Agostino's creative process works. "It is a piece I wrote while reflecting on something I'd been reading with relation to the series of diminishing-palette monoprints, 'Appearance Adrift in the Garden.' The work then became the title for the exhibit," explains D'Agostino.

Unity of words and images, interdependence between individual pieces and between series of works create narratives in his work. "A piece I make is not complete until it has a title," he says.



I am fascinated and entertained by the installation of 41 triptychs on cardboard series titled *Keine Ahnung 7*, (2011). Every single triptych on the kitchen wall at Norte Maar , contains an image broken down into three parts or three related images. Individual triptychs each contain a narrative governed by different syntax.



From left to right, the pieces read: "Erodes... Stuns ...Reshapes." and "Atlantis touched down Thursday at Kennedy ... Space Center in Florida ... concluding a 30-year space program."

Moreover, D'Agostino keeps the reference for each collage images he uses, and sticks the source at the back of each piece. This way, he forms a unique system of "citation" for his collage works.



The thinking process Paul D'Agostino uses when creating art is similar to the process of developing an idea and curating art shows at Centotto. Visualization of an idea or reading usually leads to sophisticated group shows or even *simposia*, which is what he calls his extended art exhibitions that include artist talk components. D'Agostino's curatorial concepts tend to be remarkable.

Paul D'Agostino had to think for a couple of seconds when I asked him if there is something he isn't good at. "I was in a band in graduate school, but I wasn't very good at playing guitar and drums," he said.

Paul D'Agostino: Appearance Adrift in the Garden is on view at Norte Maar (83 Wyckoff Avenue, #1B, Bushwick, Brooklyn) until March 4.