

## Trent Caulkins - Artist Statement

My initial fascination with latex fashion came from its provocative use in media like American Horror Story. The shiny black material and elaborate costumes captured my imagination, sparking my curiosity about the creative subcultures that use latex for self-expression and performance. In researching these communities, I discovered entire subcultures built around unconventional forms of personal liberation. Beneath surface assumptions of sexuality, I found deeper values of freedom, welcoming, and embracing radical self-concepts. Working across diverse media including painting, photography, sculpture, and digital art, my work explores intimate themes related to BDSM, latex fashion, pet play, and Shibhari rope bondage. Experimentation with different disciplines gives me the chance to expand my artistic skills and allows me to convey connected ideas through unique aesthetics.

In my painting series "The Kennel," a bright, saturated palette directly inspired by latex hues depicts figures posed playfully in animalistic positions. While some people may see silliness, this to me reflects the lighthearted essence I have observed in pet play. I doubt anyone is thinking about taxes while crawling on all fours and barking.

Visually, I attempt to capture the essence and personality of these communities through stylistic choices, even as my technical skills develop. My goal is to construct imagery that provides artistic insight into the cultures that fascinate me.

Iconic artists like Warhol and Mapplethorpe helped shape my interdisciplinary vision in their own distinct ways. Warhol's repetitive variations inform my approach to seriality and experimentation with the same subject in different contexts. I bring that idea of a series of the same imagery in my "Good Pup" series. And Mapplethorpe's evocative posing inspires me to convey themes of dominance and vulnerability in my figures. I chose this option for my Lino prints to keep the imagery quite simple yet relative to my theme. But I also draw inspiration from lesser-known artists I discover online whose bold, taboo themes resonate with my own.

There are contrasts between my work and those that I have had inspire me. With Mapplethorpe's imagery there is a sense of it being very real, as you would see it. For most of my work I paint and draw them with a more graphic sense, they are less realistic than that of Mapplethorpe's subjects. They become closer to Warhol's images but without the vibrance in color that almost becomes their own shape in the image. In my work the colors are more part of the form. Haring's imagery at times becomes exaggerated and very abstract at times, which I attempt to avoid. I keep his use of simplicity in my linos and in many of the images of my "Priority" piece, but I also want my characters to remain closer to looking human rather than having an exaggeration in the body parts.

By embracing radical themes through diverse media and creative choices, I hope my work reveals the artistic aesthetic and deeper values within these cultures. My aim is to invite open-minded understanding rather than reactionary judgement.