

Parker Ito
***A Lil' Taste of A Lil' Taste of
Cheeto in the Night***

January 28 – March 2, 2025

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery | Center for the Arts | Wesleyan University

Parker Ito

A Lil' Taste of A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night

Ten years ago, Parker Ito opened *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night* at Château Shatto, Los Angeles. This maximal and constantly-changing exhibition included a series of eight double-sided paintings, each paired with a set of custom powder-coated chainlink and a series of bronze sculptures that riffed off the mascot of the local Los Angeles pest control company Western Exterminator. One of those paintings, *People tell me everyday that I'm really creative (peace on earth) (A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night Installation) (2013–2015)*, is now in the Public Art Collection at Wesleyan University. On the anniversary of the work's premiere, Ito re-presents this work, building a fresh installation around the painting, situating it among elements from the original exhibition, as well as new components in a singular configuration for the North Gallery of the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery. In a 2015 text published in *Artforum*, Parker Ito writes, "I want to make exhibitions where there is always a potential for the work to be shifting." Regularly associated with Post-Internet art, Ito redefines this genre as an all-encompassing condition of viewership today, such that "you can look at cave paintings magnified by a thousand times their original size online."

Interview with Orion Martin

Benjamin Chaffee

Orion Martin is uniquely positioned as an interlocutor of Parker Ito's practice for the context of this 2025 exhibition of Ito's work in the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Center for the Arts, Wesleyan University. Martin has a personal connection to the curator Benjamin Chaffee '00, and also worked in Ito's studio from 2013 to 2015, throughout the production process of Ito's *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night* at Château Shatto, Los Angeles in 2015. This was the initial presentation of *People tell me everyday that I'm really creative (peace on earth) (A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night Installation)* (2013–2015). This painting was later gifted to Wesleyan University's Public Art Collection by the Valentine family in 2023.

An exhibiting artist on his own, Martin has shown his own paintings in solo exhibitions at High Art, Arles, France; Derosia (formerly Bodega), New York; Favorite Goods, Los Angeles; and Important Projects, Oakland; as well as in a group exhibition, Flatlands, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2016. Chaffee organized a solo exhibition of Martin's paintings at Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago in 2017.

In the interview below Martin shares his observations on a period of intense development and production in Ito's studio leading up to Ito's solo show at Château Shatto. Martin delves into the ways that the processes of the work's production, as well as Ito's own installation strategies, are used to generate content in the work. This content includes Ito's own self-mythologization, distributively produced by the group of studio assistants, including Martin himself, who here assists in narrativizing that process.

This interview was edited from a conversation between Martin and Chaffee while Martin drove north from Los Angeles to Sonoma, California on Tuesday, November 26, 2024.

How did you come to work with Parker Ito?

I was originally hired by a gallerist. Parker had his first show with some of the 3M paintings in it, similar to *Agony and Ecstasy* (2014), the other painting in the Public Art Collection at Wesleyan. I was hired to drive out to Long Beach, California where Parker was living at his parent's house. I was the original assistant. Later there were eight of us assisting in the studio, at the time of the making of *People tell me everyday that I'm really creative (peace on earth) (A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night Installation)* (2013–2015).



Parker Ito, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, 2014
Vinyl over enamel on 3M Scotchlite
64 x 46 x 1 inches.
Gift of The Valentine Family.
Collection of Wesleyan University.

The gallery had hired me to drive to Parker's dad's house to assemble stretchers and stretch the works in his backyard. Eventually Parker moved into my studio in Highland Park. It was a 300 square foot studio in a really shitty building.

I think I did a studio visit with you there in preparation for your show at Corbett vs. Dempsey in 2017, right?

Yes that space! Parker moved into that building and was there for a while. It was crazy because he was making a lot of money at that point selling artwork but we were making it in the shittiest place. It was me and my friends in our shitty studio.

He was starting to do crazy stuff. He would fill up the studio with smoke trying to make his studio into a kind of immersive environment – everything was stacked on top of itself. Eventually he moved out

because we were making crazy quantities of work and also inventing new processes in a small space. We also were trying to spray car paint because he liked this color-changing car paint. We used to do that in this chicken coop behind the studio building which was just so crazy. It was in that space that we were carving the initial sculpture for the bronzes that ended up later being cast a million times.

Eventually he got this other studio that was a lot bigger and he added more studio assistants. This is when we were making these texture paintings that ended up being the body of work for *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night*.

We were making 25 of these double-sided texture paintings that were 55" x 35" or something like that. We needed all these people because the method that we had developed in Highland Park was that I would scrape on molding paste and then I would project an image over that. I would draw an image in with the back of a pencil or something just to scrape in the line. Then that would be taken to a fabricator who would spray it with chrome autobody paint.

Then we would paint on top of that in oil paint. Then a fabricator would put a top coat on it so that it would have a glossy finish. We also took the stretchers to a fabricator for coating with autobody paint.

During that time period Parker had one big painting ordered from China. That one work established a new method of working that resulted in deliveries of massive paintings from China. It was this process that created the big painting you have there, *People tell me everyday that I'm really creative (peace on earth) (A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night Installation)* (2013–2015). Parker developed a two-sided painting with a stretcher painted



From left to right: Parker Ito, in protective gear for spraying autobody paint outside a makeshift spraybooth in a former chicken coop behind the studio. 2013. Daniel Lane in protective gear, pictured assisting in Parker Ito's studio, carving a foam block for the initial sculpture of the iconic figure of the Los Angeles' Western Exterminator Company. This foam carving was turned into wax, further manipulated, and then cast into bronze at a metal-working foundry. 2013. Photos by Orion Martin.

with autobody enamel. We were always un-stretching and re-stretching paintings. That was a big part of the job.

We would just get a shipment of 10 new paintings from China and we would roll them out on the ground and get going. Daniel would find an interesting material on the internet, Parker would approve and then next thing we'd be pouring chemicals all over these paintings. That wouldn't produce the results we wanted so we'd rent hardwood floor sanders and just sand this chemical in the parking lot all day.

Parker was photographing everything all the time and he was skateboarding a lot in there. The buckets and the boxes started stacking up and we worked on easels in between them. That was the peak madness. I forget which collector it was, someone bought a bunch of paintings from him with a briefcase of cash. I think he got a hundred grand in cash or something.

Parker would just keep stacks of hundred dollar bills in a paint can with screws in it. There'd be like \$40,000 sitting in there. If we ever needed something from Home Depot or something we would just go to the bucket and get the cash. It was a super fun job. For example, one time Parker asked us to hire our friends and pay them with cash to make paintings of some flowers.

We moved into this insanely big studio. We started working on the group of paintings that you have one of...we made roughly 25 of those. We made everything in series. Each one of those paintings was double-sided and about 10 x 12 feet. Every painting had so many moving parts now. We had to have all of the pieces painted separately and they were all getting framed. And those were all going to get painted differently.



Production image of manipulated bronze sculptures from Parker Ito's studio. Photo by Orion Martin.



Sketch by Orion Martin depicting Parker Ito. 2014
Photo by Orion Martin.

The painting we have here, *People tell me everyday...* is 122 x 96 inches.

They were massive. We built big walls so that we could have multiple double-sided stations with people painting on either side. We hired a bunch of new painters. Lauren joined, Justin was full-time then, Celia, and others. Daniel and I worked full time. Nora was hired as the studio manager which was a crazy shift. Parker hadn't recorded any of the money he'd ever spent. The studio manager came in and was just like, "Holy shit, what the fuck?" That's when things got a little bit more official. We had to keep receipts.

Parker's 2014 show at White Cube, London was all double-sided textured paintings. The show incorporated faces, shoes, carpeting, string LED lights – it was the seeds of what would become the *Cheeto in the Night* installation. Parker credited that show, instead of using just his

name, he used all of his assistants' names. He didn't ask any of us beforehand. Eventually the show opened and I realized, "Oh, my name is at that White Cube show. That's really random and weird."

It was getting really crazy in the studio with so many projects on top of each other. Daniel and I were basically goons that were driving stuff around to different fabricators, always on the phone. We went and did the bronze sculptures at the foundry. They cast all of the sculptures into wax. Parker, Daniel, and I manipulated the wax, just kind of messed them up, and then those were all cast into bronze.

We had those coming into the studio and we were taking those to get painted in the craziest, most expensive ways, and then attaching expensive auto parts to them. It was this real kitchen-sink kind of situation where everything was supposed to be



Installation view of Parker Ito, *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night*, 2015, Château Shatto, Los Angeles. Orion Martin's drumset from a performance within the exhibition. Photo by Orion Martin.

getting on everything else. It was really a lot of madness with tons of scaffolding everywhere. Parker was skateboarding all the time. He had treadmills and exercise equipment in there, which is still how his studio is now, just a total madhouse full of gym equipment and paintings on the ground. It's much smaller now.

It seems like the development of a personal mythology are important parts of Parker's practice. Is that true?

He had a kind of personal mythology. He would say things like, "Laura Owens and Jeff Koons, I want my artwork to look like that." To me this seemed almost insane. That was just the level of ambition he had, that he could consider himself on a level with those historically-important artists. I was always impressed by his confidence. The self-mythology became part of the work. I started doing drawings of him as a cartoon character.



One example of a custom-printed cardboard box with photographic images from Parker Ito's desktop. The top, reversed image, is Parker Ito and the bottom figure is Orion Martin. Photographed in Parker Ito's studio, 2014. Photo by Orion Martin.

As assistants in the studio how much input did you have into decisions about the work? How did your particular artistic skills come into play in Parker's studio?

Drawing cartoony ballpoint pen drawings was something that I was already good at and Parker would play to the strengths of all of the people he had hired. This was one of the reasons it was really fun because we all felt really good at our job.

Anything we could think of, Parker was just like, "Yeah, do it. Let's do it." It was all about generating content and using content to generate more content. Parker's a very interested guy. He would take our ideas really seriously and figure out how to make it work. It wasn't a collaboration at all, but everyone felt really good about what they were doing. It was really inspiring to be a part of, to watch an artist be as fluid as he was—to just make it work and be so committed to the process. I

think that everyone who worked for him really benefited from being a part of the studio and the rapid turnover production of artwork.

Can you tell me more about the development of *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night* at Château Shatto?

It was a year and a half of my life working all the time. Château Shatto had opened as a gallery in 2014. They rented the building immediately behind it that was scheduled for demolition. It was totally empty and it was huge. Parker's solo show in early 2015, *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night*, was in that space.

It was a lot of hours. Those paintings were really well made because Parker's standards were pretty high. Also the people he hired were all accomplished painters in their own right. The paintings from China were always also really well made.

We hung about twenty of the big paintings, many medium-sized paintings, and small paintings framed in chrome frames. There were all of those bronze sculptures and ceramic works as well. There were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of feet of chain and massive amounts of LED lights all over. It was crazy expensive to produce.

Then he started ordering things, just random stuff. He ordered from China these steel tubes covered in cement to look like fake palm trees. They were the size of real palm trees. They got held at customs and arrived halfway through the show. We had to bring these cement and steel tubes into the show that was already maximally installed with pricey, expensively-produced artworks. We were dragging these insanely heavy, ugly things through this bedazzled, sparkling chrome frame space with chains everywhere.

We had to be like *Mission Impossible* to get through.

It was full of smoke all the time. My band played there. He had a children's choir sing there. There were buckets and boxes everywhere.

So, the big painting that we have here, was one side of that painted in China?

The painting of the black and white sculpture making the moaning face, that's what we received from China. I think that the angels were also painted in China. I know for sure we painted the Japanese characters on that one and I have the feeling that we added the red geometry as well. The flippancy of how he would just send off images to China to have them made, it was just crazy. It was such a stream-of-conscious kind of making, you know?

Sometimes you would paint over the painting after it arrived from China?

Every time! The backside of that painting of the little boys was painted in China as well. That one has transparent resin poured on it—that was one of the weird R&D processes that Daniel had come up with.

All those bright colors?

That's some resin or something. That was another painting that was put on the ground immediately after arriving. Parker usually had a pretty good idea of what steps were going to happen to the works at that point in their development.

So there were a lot of post-production steps in the studio – it wasn't like the paintings were wholly made to completion somewhere else.

Absolutely.



Production image of Parker Ito, *People tell me everyday that I'm really creative (peace on earth) (A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night Installation)*, 2013-2015, oil on canvas, acrylic on aluminum strainers, artist frame, hanging hardware, 122 x 96 x 2 1/2 inches. Photo by Orion Martin.

I know that Parker has spoken about the 2015 show at Château Shatto as a realization that an exhibition could be like his artist website, that everything is linked together like a flow state of information where signs are floating, detached, like scrolling through the internet or social media. The signified and the signifier are detached and new meanings are possible. Everything just floats through your consciousness almost like doom scrolling or like you're floating through the internet.

I know that he had all of these ideas about it being like the internet, and the maximalism, and about networking, and everything was connected, literally, by chains and stuff like that. But to me, it was all Parker's life. It was paintings of his girlfriend, paintings of his assistants, paintings of stuff in the studio, stuff from the internet, there's pictures of me printed on boxes...

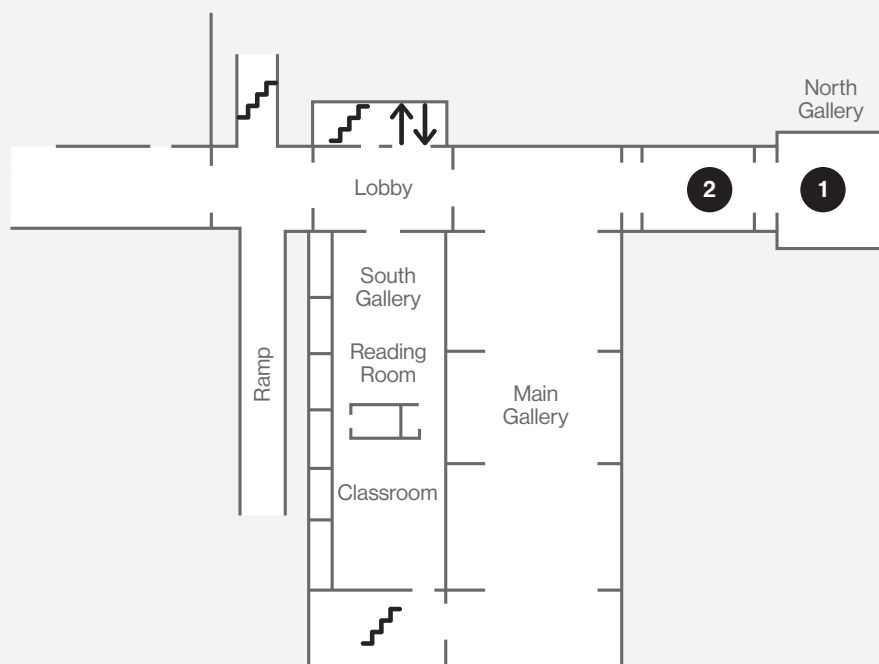
It seems like the process of making and ideating seems dependent on larger systems of production—contemporary global economic production—but also expresses something of that system, is symptomatic of it. That the images could be produced digitally, painted on another continent, and then modified further, also feels like it's procedurally coming from the same place that he's talking about with regards to the content of the Château Shatto exhibition, that an exhibition could be like a website.

It looked like the desktop of his computer but just completely insane where, like you say, all things were treated equally. That was the idea...to shove the computer desktop into physical space but make it huge and insane.



Installation in-progress of Parker Ito, *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night*, 2015, Château Shatto, Los Angeles. Photo by Orion Martin.

ZILKHA GALLERY MAIN FLOOR



1

Parker Ito

People tell me everyday that I'm really creative (peace on earth)

(A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night Installation)

2013–2015

Oil on canvas, acrylic on aluminum strainers, artist frame,
hanging hardware

122 x 96 x 2½ inches

Gift of the Valentine Family. Collection of Wesleyan University.

2

Parker Ito

Western Exterminator / Kernel Kleenup / Little Man / Pesterminator

(automotive pink)

2013–2015

Bronze, automotive paint, hanging hardware

34 x 36 x 16 inches

Courtesy of the artist.

Profile

Parker Ito (b. 1986) is a contemporary artist. He is a fourth generation Japanese American, or Yonsei, living and working in Los Angeles.

Related Events

Opening Reception

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 at 4:30pm
Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Artist Talk with Parker Ito

Wednesday, January 29, 2025 at 4:30pm
Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Lunch and Learn

Monday, February 3, 2025 at Noon
Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Curated by Associate Director of Visual Arts Benjamin Chaffee '00 with Exhibitions Manager Rosemary Lennox and Preparator Paul Theriault. Special thanks to Exhibitions Interns Noah Shacknai '25 and Safiya Sikkem-Miles '25. Thank you to Parker Ito, Orion Martin, Rani Arbo, Andrew Chatfield, John Elmore, Lynette Vandlik, and Joshua Lubin-Levy. Additional support for this exhibition and related programs were provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.



The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

Cover image: Studio in-progress image of Parker Ito, *People tell me everyday that I'm really creative (peace on earth) (A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night Installation)*, 2013–2015, oil on canvas, acrylic on aluminum strainers, artist frame, hanging hardware, 122 x 96 x 2½ inches. Photo by Orion Martin.



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