

## Press Reviews

Alison Luthi 'Wes Lang', Issue Magazine , Autumn 2019



Some people seem to have found their vocation simply by listening to the ring of their own name—a human onomatopoeia of name and being. For example, the name “Wes Lang” sounds like a down-to-earth artist whose work is on its way to being iconic, not to mention a guy you’d enjoy hanging out with. Wes Lang, the man and artist, is laid back, speaks with slow, casual candor, and is a pleasure to observe as he meanders around his studio, dog in arm, adding details to his pieces.

During our visit, Wes shared a common philosophy behind his art: “how to get what you want out of life.” Yet, in his few years in Los Angeles, this New York transplant hasn’t looked too far for opportunities many artists would dream of. Wes has done art for The Grateful Dead and Kanye West, among other collaborations. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Wes to discuss his art, along with friend / collaborator Robert Keith, who told the story behind the “Golden Indian” and their connection to Damien Hirst.

Alyson Luthi: What brought you to LA?

Wes Lang: Early 2011, I quit working with the gallery I was with in New York, took my savings, and brought my girl and my motorcycle out here. I moved into the Chateau and did this series of drawings on the stationary. The people I was working with in New York didn’t want to help fund it so I talked to a friend that has Oh-Wow Gallery out here. We decided to produce it together and did this one night exhibition in the penthouse, and it went super well.

From that time I was staying at the Chateau, I started meeting some good people that helped me navigate the city. I met Darren Romanelli who gave me a foot in the door. He linked me up to work with The Grateful Dead and helped me get to do a series of rolexes with George Bamford in London. So I was coming out here to work on stuff and other projects started popping up. I was happy as hell when I was here and pissed as shit when I was in New York, so I just decided to move here permanently. I had also met Rob while living there. We’d shoot the shit in my room and figured we could make a piece out of gold.

AL: Where did the Golden Indian come from?

WL: I originally pictured that piece being twelve feet tall and made out of bronze. I had a mock

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of it made out of clay. Then one day Rob was at my house and said, "How dope would it be to have this thing made out of gold?" And after he left I was like, "We're actually going to do that", even though it was a totally absurd thing to do. We immediately started coming up with a plan and then it just happened.

Robert Keith: The first challenge was the amount of gold! At that time, I was working with the World Gold Council which allowed me to pull it off. The whole thing was a crazy journey to bring it to life. We have a great story of trying to deliver it.

WL: I visited the place that was producing it, and they weren't quite done. So when I left I was freaking out because I needed get on a plane to Denmark and bring this thing with me. The day of my flight, one of the production guys hopped on his bike and rode as fast as he could from Downtown to LAX. I was on the sidewalk pacing and smoking. I had four minutes to get on the airplane. He got there and handed me the shoebox the Indian was in—I hadn't even seen it. I got on the plane and laid down and sighed like, "It fucking happened."

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TO TEACH PEOPLE A LOT ABOUT HOW TO GET  
WHAT THEY WANT OUT OF THEIR LIFE."

— WES LANG

RK: The Golden Indian was just the beginning. I was visiting Damien Hirst in London, and I told him I was interested in the art business in general. It was fascinating to me because I've been an artist my whole life, but I didn't understand the massive role of the people behind the scenes in the art world. He said, "I'll teach you. Anything you want to know." And I said, "Alright, well what if I know of someone who's a great artist?" And he said, "Who?" And I said, "Well, have you ever heard of Wes Lang?" He was like, "I know that name. Actually, I think I had a t-shirt by him! Have him send a book."

So Wes did, and Damien asked, "What's available?" And I asked Wes, and he said, "Nothing. It's all sold." And I told Damien, who said, "What do you mean, nothing's available? What's he got?" And Wes said, "Well, I've got my new exhibition that no one's seen, and the gold Indian, and a motorcycle." And Damien said, "I want all of it."

AL: Where does your work originate from and what has it turned into? Anytime anybody Googles you "Americana" is mentioned.

WL: I definitely made things a lot of years ago that had a strong American theme. I did shows called "American Beauty", "Are You Ready For The Country", "Promised Land". That was earlier on though. It's not that I've steered away from that because obviously I paint Indians all the time, but I'm not painting about the country. I'm painting about myself and trying to teach people a lot about how to get what they want out of their life. That's the main focus of what I'm talking about.

I think I've been able to steer my art away from America being the topic that people are talking to me about. There was never a political agenda behind it, I just wanted people to feel good when they look at it. And they do. Now because of the internet people try to know who I am, and it's very weird to me. It's because of the things I've done with music, fashion brands and all these different places. Wherever I go, someone invariably knows what I do and tells me what it means to them, and that's awesome. The American notion is not where I'm coming from—not anymore. I'm allowed to change what I'm talking about. I've been doing this as a living for a long time. Fourteen years. It evolves.

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Kanye. There are also many folks that want paintings. I'm very lucky.

AL: What are you listening to?

WL: Lately, I've been listening to a lot of classical music. Mostly Mahler and Chopin. And lots of Grateful Dead. Glen Gould. I kind of obsess and listen to the same record over and over again. I have a playlist called "Everyday" that I listen to everyday. I also love Coldplay, John Frusciante's solo stuff, Micah P. Hinson . . . but mostly The Grateful Dead.

AL: So it was a dream come true for you to do art for The Grateful Dead.

WL: Oh, absolutely. I grew up going to shows and collecting t-shirts and tapes. That happened because I was listening to a show in my room at The Chateau, and Darren came over, who was into The Dead. He was like, "How cool would it be to work with The Grateful Dead?" I said, "Fucking amazing." Then all of a sudden I was. That's how my life works. I stay focused on the things I want to do, and eventually they end up happening.

AL: What do you think about the rising creative scene in Los Angeles?

WL: I mean, I know it's going on. I don't know a lot of the artists here yet. Even though I'm downtown, I don't get around much or go to openings often. I know more people that are making music and movies. Everyone I hang out with is doing something positive and exciting. It's not so important to me to feel a community of visual artists per se—just people creating things. It doesn't have to be on canvas.

I moved here in 1990 after high school. I worked at Fred Segal, lived right by Fairfax High School, and it was fucking dark here. I only lasted about a year then moved back to the east coast. But now I've got more and more friends who are moving here and visiting a lot, like how I was. Every time I'd come I'd say, "I'm thinking about moving here." That's happened a lot to people because there's some really good shit going on in this town. I don't know how to put my finger on it. I don't know if anybody does yet. But it's got a thing happening, there's no two ways about it.