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April 9th, 2013

Being Paul Octavious

We flipped the camera on one of the most insanely creative photographers in the business (you probably already follow him on Instagram).

Written by Jourdan Crouch Fairchild

Photographed by Marc Moran

"A friend just texted me and said, 'What's the mad scientist up to today?'" says Paul Octavious with a chuckle. The Chicago-based photographer's wildly original work (think cameras with wings and leaning trees) has earned him gigs with big-name clients like New Balance and The Wall Street Journal. And on Instagram, he's practically a god. Octavious has 334,000 followers—that's 21,000 more than Ryan Gosling.

Octavious' rise to photo fame has been relatively recent. Trained in graphic design, the 29-year-old Connecticut native began his career photographing T-shirts for Threadless in 2007. "And then I realized I really hate shooting T-shirts, so I quit," he says. But rather than wait for the perfect opportunity to come knocking, Octavious hit the ground running. For years, he'd been convincing friends and family to let him shoot them in off-beat poses and covered in stuff like coffee grounds.

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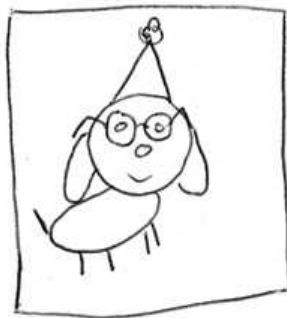


So he began focusing on his surroundings, like the everyday activity atop a hill in his neighborhood for his “Same Hill, Different Day” series. A few years later, The New York Times Lens blog picked it up, as did several other major media outlets. And that was just the beginning. Since then, he’s photographed everything from the Hurricane Sandy Benefit Concert to a story on sprinkles-eating cows for *Wired*.

But it’s the personal projects that really get Octavious fired up. Just spend an afternoon with the man, and you’ll witness how seamlessly he translates fantasy into reality. “When I look at a stacks books, I think, why can’t I stack them into the shape of a number?” he says. And so he does. He’ll even go to great lengths for an Instagram photo, like the snowmen series he shot last December using cookies from his local Starbucks. “I had to keep going back and buying more cookies, so yeah, they definitely thought I was crazy,” he admits. On an average day, you’ll find Octavious setting up and snapping scenes in his apartment, where he stores his growing collection of props culled from local thrift shops. His most recent purchase: a porcelain owl with glowing eyes.

So what’s up next? “I’ve been working on a traveling series that showcases just how small we are on this big planet,” Octavious says. When he’s inspired to take a photograph of some stunning setting—like Cannon Beach in Oregon, the site of the opening scene in *The Goonies*—he’ll recruit a friend to wave an oversized red flag and shoot her or him from afar. “It’s like the tiny person is yelling back at the giant landscape and saying “I am here!” Just like his subjects, Octavious has arrived...and he’s planning to stay for awhile.

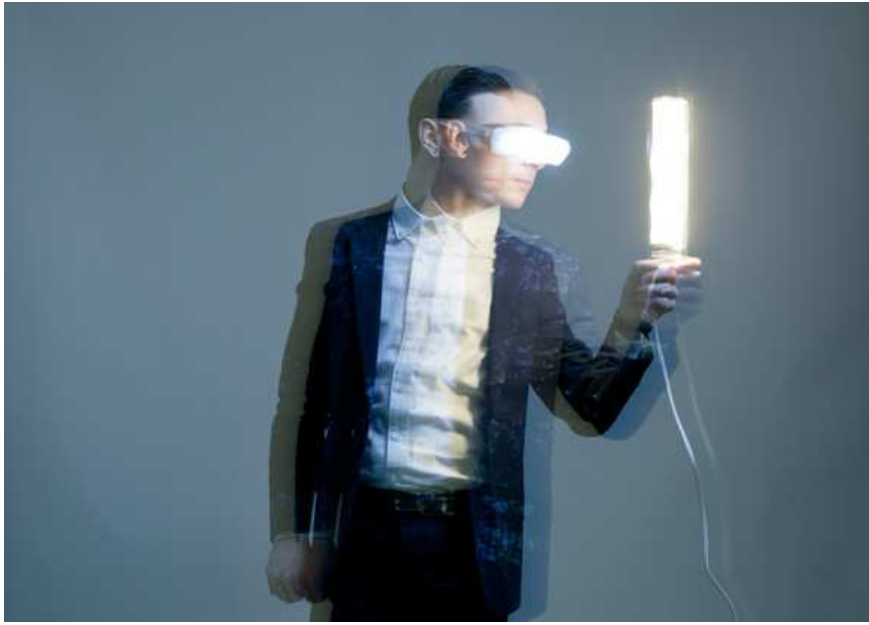
Keep scrolling to see Paul’s take on apartment number 9 menswear—plus sketches that reveal one of his secrets to Instagram success.



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