

Gltn, 10 de octubre de 2016



TODD JAMES (REAS) INTERVIEW

ART // OCTOBRE 10TH, 2016



À l'occasion de sa nouvelle exposition personnelle (*We Are One* – voir ici) à la galerie madrilène **Javier Lopez & Fer Frances**, Guillotine s'est entretenu avec **Todd James (REAS)**. L'artiste new-yorkais qui présente (jusqu'au 2 novembre) ses nouvelles œuvres, dévoile une fois de plus sa vision où la guerre, la mort et le chaos contrastent avec les femmes nues se relaxant au soleil. Il nous parle de ses influences, son processus créatif et l'évolution permanente de son œuvre, ainsi que ses futurs projets.



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GUILLOTINE: Can you tell us a little about the new body of work? What were your inspirations, what themes are you exploring and what were the reasons behind choosing *We Are One* as the title of the show?

Todd James: I came up with the title when there was a lot of crazy things going on. I thought that was a good way to mellow things out, to remember that everybody is connected. It's something you got to remember when everything is getting out of control. There are paintings here with ladies relaxing but then there's conflict. It's both conflict and relaxation. I did a video for U2 and in it I used images that were from paintings and then I came up with new images that I liked and hadn't been made into paintings. That was all about the same theme, about conflict and trying to cool things out.

«It's both conflict and relaxation.»

What effect do you personally wish and think this show had on the spectator?

I don't really think of it that way. This is the first time I'm looking at it all in one room! When I work in my studio, when I finish a painting they get staked so it's hard to look at them all. So as I'm going, each thing feels different, but in the back of my head I kind of know what the feeling is going to be. I guess I'll just see what everybody feels.



«In my paintings I'm not condemning or celebrating too much, I'm just looking at it.»

Your work frequently touches on the subject of war and refugees. Do you consider your art political and yourself to be an activist in some way?

Not really an activist. I don't know if there's an exact point of view because things aren't just one way. In my paintings I'm not condemning or celebrating too much, I'm just looking at it. It's not really activism, maybe a little bit sometimes...

Phil Frost had a show here two years ago and when we published the pictures of the exhibition on Guillotine, he asked us if we could delete the mention Beautiful Loser as he hated now the whole idea. How do you feel about the Beautiful Losers and do you still feel part of the artistic group?

It's a loosely tied together situation. I don't have super strong feelings one way or the other. Out of those people I did things with Barry McGee and Steve Powers, and I'm friend with a couple of the other guys. At that time it made some kind of sense. I don't hate it and I don't feel strongly one way or the other.

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How does your work process look like? I know you do a lot of sketching.

I draw a lot and then I make paintings out of the drawings. Sometimes I draw on paper, sometimes I draw on the computer, mostly on paper and then I turn them into paintings.

You started painting the New York Subway system at a very young age. Is it something that somehow still attracts you and do you sometimes paint illegally?

I don't really paint graffiti at all anymore. I still like some of the things, I like some of it. I'll do a piece here and there but not like illegally. I still draw stuff but I'm not super aware of what is going on anymore. I see stuff every once in a while and think « Wow that's cool », but I don't go out painting.



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«(Street Market) was big, it was huge for me!»

2016 marks the 16th anniversary of *Street Market*. With hindsight, how do you perceive this exhibition in your artistic career?

That was huge for me. Me and Steve had an idea and I guess he applied for a grant to do it. At that time I think we had done one other small show together. He talked about getting the grant money, the guy called him back and he was like « Yeah, we want to do the show! ». They did it in Philadelphia, at the Institute for Contemporary Art, that was the first one. And Barry didn't make the *Street Market* part of it with us, but he did his own room right next to it. Alex Baker was the curator and he was the guy that helped to get the funding for it. Once he did that, then Jeffrey Deitch wanted to bring it to New York. So we brought it to New York and he extended it there and it got picked to be a part of the Venice Biennale. I didn't even know what that was at the time! We also did a mini version of it in Japan. It was big, it was huge for me! I feel it's like when musicians make their first album and they put everything they've thought of and have been into up until that point. Before I did this I used to do cartooning and graphic designing, I did the Source logo and a bunch of other music things. Steve did some hip hop magazines. We both had a similar sense of humor, so everything that we did or were into got fused into that, and that was the outcome.



You're a big fan of role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*. Can you tell us more about this passion of yours?

I was into it when it first came out, when I was just a kid. I always liked it. Then I got into writing, which is similar because you're going underground into a dungeon, on a little adventure. Eventually I grew out of it, or grew away from it. Then maybe three years ago when they re-released the game in LA and they were promoting it, I noticed it and was like « Oh, shit! ». Then a friend of mine was like: « I've been thinking of playing D&D... ». So that's kind of how I got back into it. And now there are a lot of other great RPGs that I'm into, some of them are really good. I met the guys who created the game *Torchbearer*, they live in Queens, NY, and the game is great. It just got other mechanics in it that make the game fun for me. Anyway, it's like a hobby, it's a fun thing to be into.



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You've been working on hand painted ceramics with Case Study on many occasions and last year you released with Medicom a plush for Japan, *Tit Wizard*. Can we expect more from you in this field? Maybe a new 3D figure?

Right now I haven't anything planned, but I'm thinking about whatever it will be. I don't know yet what. I was thinking about it on this travel from New York to Madrid: « I should do something new! ». But I'm trying to work on some animated ideas, animation broadcast, but that's a very difficult thing to get going. It's still something that is in the back of my head.

Do you collect art yourself?

I should more! Kaws does a lot, and when I see what he's doing it reminds me I should collect more! Actually I have art from people I'm friends with. I've bought some of the art from some of the RPGs, because I'm just into it, in a different way. I also have graffitis, some stuffs by other people like Blade, tons of people. I should focus on that too.

Any other future projects or shows you can let your fans know about?

There is a new book that isn't made yet but it's going to go to the printer soon. It's about paper paintings, works on paper. My wife's company **Testify Books** is the publisher. I've made zines and a 12 x 12 inch book about fantasy but they're not out with a distributor. It's a headache dealing with that.

Guillotine remercie Cristina Yagüe et Fer Frances de la galerie Javier Lopez & Fer Frances.