

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

ART PROSTITUTE



ISSUE 04

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LAYOUT: COFFEY

PHOTOS: BOATWRIGHT



What is your educational background?

From an early age, I was taught to look seriously at art and art history. I grew up in Virginia Beach attending a school for the gifted and talented where I studied in the art program. I attended Carnegie Mellon University on a scholarship and graduated in 1994 magna cum laude with a bachelor of fine arts degree. Throughout school in Pittsburgh, I interned at The Andy Warhol Museum, a public relations firm, and at a design firm. When I graduated, I moved straight to Manhattan where I have lived and worked since.

Was your undergraduate experience at Carnegie Mellon conducive to what you are doing now, or was it tailored to client-based work?

When I was at CMU, the program was very process-driven with a parallel emphasis placed on rhetoric. So, no, the experience was not at all tailored to client-based work. And, yes, it certainly informed my approach to art-making.

At what point did your design sensibility start to take shape?

One of my thesis projects in school involved designing an icon system for Amtrak. While fulfilling the project requirements for designing way-finding systems throughout the train stations and train cars, I became very interested in using this authoritative and universal visual language to reflect personal expressions of a more poetic nature.

What drew you towards art?

Nothing in particular drove me towards art. Making work is not a choice, but rather a default state or a way of life. It's not really something I have control over.

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RM

Untitled (Project Rainbow Series) Detail, 2003
oil and silkscreen ink on wood panel, 15 x 15 inches
Courtesy Deitch Projects, New York

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1 & 2. *Project Rainbow (Book Spread)*, 2003, 112 pp., ed. 2,500, published by Gingko Press, B. *Programmed to Receive*, (2003), oil and silkscreen ink on linen, 48 x 36 inches, Courtesy Delich Projects, New York, 4. *Untitled (Project Rainbow Series), Detail* (2003), oil and silkscreen ink on wood panel, 15 x 15 inches, Courtesy Delich Projects, New York, 5. *The Incredible Dust Collecting Machine*, (2003), oil and silkscreen ink on linen, 48 x 36 inches, Courtesy Delich Projects, New York.

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Excuses and Curses, 2003
oil and silkscreen ink on linen, 48 x 36 inches
Courtesy Deitch Projects

As a viewer of one of your pieces, am I to discern a single message from the piece as a whole? Or are the elements operating independently?

It's completely up to you.

Is the use of flat shapes, iconography and geometric forms an attempt at a more universal way of communicating with a global audience?

Yes, but this is not my sole reason for concentrating on such forms. I'm simply most proficient at creating this kind of visual language - so much so, that often my drawings are mistaken for having been sourced elsewhere. If I were good at photo-realism or abstract expressionism, then, naturally, I would be working with those languages. Working with flat shapes, iconography, and geometric forms is where I've been coming from since I worked as an illustrator for the Navy in high school. It's a very personal and deep-seated aesthetic for me that has been evolving for almost two decades. That's why it's so strange for me to see it so widely imitated.

How was it that you were working for the Navy in High School?

I was dating a girl whose mother worked on one of the Navy bases. The mother knew I was interested in art, so she asked me to design a logo for one of the recreation divisions. The department liked the logo, and they offered me an after-school job as an illustrator for the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department for the base. Basically, I designed flyers, posters, tickets, and menus for different events. It was all cut and paste. I worked with a typewriter, Kroy lettering machine, hot wax machine, and photocopier. I remember we could change the toner color in the copier to cyan or magenta, so we could make multi-colored flyers with loose registration by sending the paper through numerous times. Although it was before my formal training, I was enthusiastic about experimenting with type and image manipulation. I would stay late and work on cassette covers and posters for my band and report covers and presentation materials for school.

"The Warholian strategy of incorporating methods of mass-production into art is now being flipped: artists are incorporating art into methods of mass-production."



Besides the overall strangeness of it, how do you feel about your work being so widely imitated?

Children learn through imitation, and I accept the role of being a teacher.

You were quoted as saying, "I believe real culture involves a back and forth between producers and consumers with everyone playing both roles." What do you feel your obligation is as a prominent producer of signals? How does this effect your role as a consumer?

I feel my obligation is to produce and share honest messages that reflect my unique human experience. As a consumer, I am often angered and disgusted at the numerous false and deceitful messages being sent. I get depressed seeing an Abercrombie and Fitch monoculture emerging in America's middle-class as a result of mainstream media corporations broadcasting and publishing unintelligent crap and creating their own self-reflective superficial histories. Of course, we're all past the point of recognizing and complaining that our culture is consumer-driven. What's frustrating to see now is that what's being produced and consumed for the masses is so lame. The future of culture depends on art competing directly with the entertainment, gaming, and retail industries. For me, the situation begs two questions that I'm currently grappling with: Is it better to supply or deny? And, If you want to go mass, do you have to go dumb?

RM

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oil and silkscreen ink on wood panel, 15 x 15 inches
Courtesy Deitch Projects, New York

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THIS PAGE: (top) Ryan in the studio. (bottom) *Worlds within Worlds*, 2003, installation view, Courtesy Deitch Projects, New York
OPPOSITE PAGE: Ryan in his studio.

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"I became very interested in using this authoritative and universal visual language to reflect personal expressions of a more poetic nature."

How do you perceive the role of the consumer goods you produce in your art?

I've always produced works that exist throughout the price-point range. I've been making skateboards, t-shirts, books, videos, stickers, etc. while producing paintings, prints, and installations. Exercising artistic expression through this range of output is a model of production that a lot of younger artists are embracing. What I want to be most careful about is inflating or fabricating value. The value of an object is directly proportional to its inherent properties, such as material integrity and object scarcity. Market demand, of course, is a factor that is more variable and subject to context and environment. Additionally, an object that is made as a direct result of the existence of an individual human at any given space and time (on one end of the spectrum) is certainly valued differently than a mass-produced object that has been made by a corporation throughout a broader space and

time (on the other end of the spectrum). This brings us to the prophetic Duchampian idea of the point-and-sign artist with the ready-made. While choice and context may define art and reduce it to mere style in a consumer culture, the human element still plays an important role as the artist's signature and title fulfill the final requirements for art (according to Duchamp). Exploiting different methods of fabrication while taking advantage of distribution channels (especially made possible within the last ten years by the internet) has allowed artists like myself to share work with a broader audience than was once possible. The Warholian strategy of incorporating methods of mass-production into art is now being flipped: artists are incorporating art into methods of mass-production. The difference is subtle but important, and the strategy provides a way of actually injecting mainstream culture with content that is hopefully more thoughtful than what would otherwise be available. 