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INTERVIEW: TALKING CARTOON INFLUENCES & WARRIOR WOMEN WITH TODD JAMES



If Saturday morning cartoons, buxom warrior princesses, and colorful renditions of terrorists are within your realm of interest, then Todd James should surely be one of your favorite artists. Along with countless solo and group shows, Todd's also contributed to several pop-culture projects, like being a puppet designer for Comedy Central's Crank Yankers and creating Miley Cyrus' 2013 VMA 'dancing bear' entourage and costume. And while he has yet another group show in Copenhagen this week, you can most frequently find him via one of my personal favorite channels—Instagram. There are few people whose posts I look forward to the way I do Todd's. Nothing breaks up selfies, blurry food photos, and poorly framed landscape shots like his rainbow-colored, tan-line-or-loin-cloth-clad females. I managed to get a few moments with the man himself, talking childhood influences, drifting from the graff scene, and the possibility of animation in his creative future. Check it out now, and be sure to peep our recap from his recent NYC show, *Supernatural*, up here.

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**I've been a fan of your work for some time now, there's something about it that's just so engaging. Like some artists create these works where you have to tilt your head and go "What the fuck is it?" And even though that's cool, I love the immediate gratification one gets looking at your pieces. What would you say influenced your style in the beginning?**

I've had so many influences and they've changed and rotated in and out since the beginning. I think Saturday morning cartoons where my first artistic influence, Ralph Bakshi's Spiderman cartoon, H.R. Pufnstuf, and the Japanese monster movies like Godzilla and Gamera. Bakshi, Vaughn Bode, R. Crumb, Frazetta, Jack Kirby, Tack, FBA, the Cream Wheels of Fire album cover—those are all really early influences from when I was 12. I've only added onto the list.

**Like many of your peers, you got your start underground. How did your introduction to graffiti come about? And when did you realize it was time to stop bombing?**

My friends introduced me to writing and we wrote in one of the staircases of their building one day. I felt guilty about it and told my mom and she told me "OK well just don't do that again." A few years later in eighth grade I was in a new school and met some guys who invited me to do trains. Many years later as I was making the transition into adulthood I slowly phased it out in stages.

**You tend to stick with certain themes, mainly humorous renditions of violence and women. I'm particularly fond of your female characters though, one of my favorite additions to the Instagram feed. Tell me a bit more about why you focus on this particular subject matter.**

The Somali pirates and tanks and planes are all subject matter that came from watching the news.

**What's up with all your sexy warrior princesses? Very Xena of you.**

The swords and sorcery women are totally inspired by Frazetta and Bode and all the cool sci-fi fantasy book

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covers from the '70s, as well as Dungeons and Dragons, a lot of fun source material that came back into my life. I got re-inspired by all the stuff I enjoyed early on.

**When you look at a woman on the street, do you just naturally see a Todd James version of her in your head?**

I mostly observe and study details and then when I draw those real observations get combined and influence my work. Sometimes though I see someone who I think just stepped out of my mind.

**You recently had a show in February at Sandra Gering Inc., *Supernatural*. I wasn't able to attend, but a friend said it was "almost like watching an adult cartoon series in stills." Elaborate on the inspiration for that a bit—where were you at mentally when you put the show together?**

I wanted to make a painting show that was linked to all the fantasy, swords, and sorcery woman-warrior art I was posting, but I didn't want it to be exactly the same. So the inspiration was magic gone wrong and wizardry and woman-warriors and fantasy. Most of my other work is about real world things even if it's presented in a style that's not hyper real.

**I love that you did a coloring book too. I love coloring—I know a lot of people think it's childish, but there's nothing quite as relaxing as zoning out and filling in blank space with color, especially when it's tits. Can we expect another one soon, or perhaps some other Todd James merch?**

I want to make another. I made two so far and I want to make a book or comic with the Barbarian girls and something animated.

**What are you currently working on? Any new shows or projects we can expect in the coming year?**

I've been working on paintings; I'm in a group museum show this week in Copenhagen, the Paint New

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York exhibition at Kunstforeningen GL Strand, and toward the end of the month I have a solo show in Malaga, Spain at Javier Lopez Galleria and I just sent all the works out.

