

ART OF CONVERSATION

A no news paper

2020 Sampler

6 SELECTED CONVERSATIONS

A NO NEWS
NEWSPAPER!

Stephen Butler x Matt Berninger

Hannah Perry x Ed Fornieles

Zhang Enli
x
Neil Wenman

Erwin Wurm x Peter Morgan

Ryan Gander x Cory Arcangel

Toby Ziegler x Richard Russell

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A NO NEWS NEWSPAPER
2020 SAMPLER
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STEPHEN BUTLER x MATT BERNINGER
HANNAH PERRY x ED FORNIELES
ZHANG ENLI x NEIL WENMAN
ERWIN WURM x PETER MORGAN
RYAN GANDER x CORY ARCANGEL
TOBY ZIEGLER x RICHARD RUSSELL

Hey,

We never thought we'd be thinking about a digital version of Art of Conversation.

The idea behind the launch of our no-news news-paper was always to create an analogue only experience where the size, materials and design would entice you to slow down, to take time out from the digital hurly burly for the kind of contemplation that can feel like a luxury sometimes. We wanted to give you space to contemplate big ideas, and to use the ideas flowing from conversations between the world's most creative thinkers as the spark for your own thinking.

However, when we started out in 2018 we could not have envisioned a situation where a global pandemic would do much the same kind of thing.

For those privileged enough to be able to shelter in place, the steps necessary to curb the spread of the virus have slowed the pace of life and opened up space and time that we can use to rethink what is important and what is not. But it's hard. Like many people - perhaps everyone - we're anxious about the world we're in now, and what will happen next. It can be hard to focus and to bring the same level of energy to our work when the background is the ceaseless hum of the news. We know we want to use this time to think about how we want our post-virus world to be, and we also want to sit on the sofa in our PJs watching TV and not thinking about much at all. Self care is important to everyone right now, and we want to be there to help when you are ready; we want to help create a fertile place for your ideas about what happens next to flourish. While we work on our next print issue - which we will be delaying to ensure your nearest news and art publication outlets are ready to receive it - we have worked with our amazing design team to create a version of Art of Conversation for you to read at home that can be delivered and distributed in a digital way without impacting any real-world systems.

So here we are with the Art of Conversation Sampler. We have chosen 5 conversations from the first four issues of our print newspaper that we think give you a lot to chew over. Featuring some of the world's >

most established art world names alongside some of the newest entrants to this world, hopefully, they will give you food for thought, maybe inspire you, maybe make you laugh or cry or even just make you roll your eyes. At the very least, we hope to give you a taste of what Art of Conversation is about if you haven't read it before

We have Ryan Gander and Cory Arcangel talking about their different attitudes to artists who paint (spoiler: it gets quite heated), and also the very different journeys they took to becoming contemporary artists.

There's a lovely conversation between Zhang Enli and his friend and gallerist Neil Wenman which is quite poignant, covering nature, time and peace, which are all part of Enli's practice.

Hannah Perry and Ed Fornieles talk about loneliness and the difficulties and impact of leading the life of a contemporary artist both on family and personal life. The conceptualist Erwin Wurm and his friend Peter Morgan talk about what it means to be an artist, the value of being an outsider and the definition of success.

And finally, musician and record label owner Richard Russell and artist Toby Ziegler talk about analogue and digital creativity, the difference between the worlds of contemporary art and music, how it was to work together and their long time friendship.

We hope you enjoy your time with these conversations and if it has whetted your appetite for more, take a look at the archive of issues still available on our site and sign up to our newsletter so we can let you know about the next issue and where you can find it. ArtofConversation.art or for speed AofC.co

The art world is pretty social, and we can't wait to see everyone again. We'll be partnering with the next editions of art fairs around the world; Liste, Volta, Frieze, FIAC, Art Brussels, Sunday, Armory and more so we should be in your neighbourhood and would love to meet you then. In the meantime if you have ideas, thoughts about the future, or just can't face anymore tv and fancy a chat, get in touch.

Keep safe and healthy, we'll see you soon. ◦

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TEAM

Founder & Editor-in-Chief: Mark Hayes-Westall @markhayeswestall
Design: Alex Sullivan & Max Parsons @overmatterstudio
Fashion Director: Chloe Beeney @chloebeenestyling
Advertising Director: Brendan Carey @brendanpatrickc
Editorial: Alex Moshakis @moshakis Kate Mc Ilwee @katemcilwee
Photography: Rosie Matheson @rosie_matheson Murdo Berker-Mill,
Eva Würdinge @eva_wuerdinger Oliver Malin @malinoliver

CONTACT

Art of Conversation
110 -114 Grafton Road
London
NW5 4BA
UK
mark@aofc.co
+44 774 087 2003

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THANK YOU

Hauser & Wirth @hauserwirth Lisson @lisson_gallery Simon Lee Gallery @simonleegallery
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[@ryanjgander](#)

RYAN

GANDER

[Lisson Gallery, London.](#)

&

CORY

ARCANGEL

[@cory.arcangel](#)

RYAN GANDER, ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL, OR I'M WITH YOU, 2018 BRONZE 70 X 25 X 35 CM (EACH SCULPTURE), COURTESY OF LISSON GALLERY



Ryan Gander and Cory Arcangel discuss context and intention at Lisson Gallery, London.

Ryan Gander
When did we meet?

Cory Arcangel
I saw your show in the Store Gallery in 2005? That was the first time that I'd...

RG Did you see that? That's amazing!

CA It was very cool. I can tell you what was in it, I think. But you probably know better than me

RG I wouldn't remember as I did two shows at Store Gallery.

CA It was the one with the Basquiat video.

RG Ah that one. I'd actually done three shows then. That was in the other gallery space

CA Was it later then?

RG No it was probably 2005.

CA So I saw your third show at Store Gallery. It had the Basquiat video. It had a bronze dancer...

RG That was the first one.

CA Yeah it had... a Mexico Olympic print? Or it was based on a...

RG The rings had fallen out.

CA Yeah the rings had fallen out and one other work. I can't remember the other work. There was another work at the far end.

RG There was a plaster wall I think.

CA Yeah.

RG That's a long time ago.

CA That's the first time I became aware of you. I had friends in common who knew you.

RG I knew you really well before I met you because I secretly - you don't know this - I stalked you online. I watched some interviews of you on YouTube. One of them was you at Team Gallery, it was a show and you were wearing a tie!

CA Ah, that's the Tate video.

RG And I remember thinking 'This guy is so funny and charismatic and he knows how to talk about his work', and I was really jealous of you. Jealousy is a weird thing. It was almost animosity until I watched that and it turned really quickly to 'I want to sit next to that guy in a pub or a restaurant because the type of jealousy it will give me will make me want to go to the studio and make better work', so like a positive jealousy.

CA Yeah I decided for a few months that I was gonna go preppy (Laughter) but it didn't last. But it was the same actually. I'd read about you. It was very similar. The thing is when there are two artists close to each other it creates a kind of anxiety, but then the way to do it always - it's better to jump into it, you know what I mean?

You have two artists who make very similar work they're either good friends or they really dislike each other. That's the kind of classic situation.

RG Better the devil you know...

CA Or it's like... it's just a little, like normal thing you know. But yeah 2005. I'd heard about you and I'd already started taking ideas, like the idea of taking a year off. You took a year off!

RG Yeah, I've done that.

CA I've stolen that idea, I've done that, I'm taking a year off

RG It's not really an original idea is it.

CA No, but I was like...you did an interview and you were really clever how



you talked about it. You where just, 'This is nonsense, I need to leave this for a while and to have a life'.

RG That sounds cool. Are you sure I said that?

CA You said 'I need to go and have...' Yeah you said that! I was stalking you in reverse. So that's how I know all these things about you. (Laughter)

We can talk about my firsts rule. I have three rules about art making. One I can't remember so we'll talk about the second one; you're only as good as your last game.

What do you think about that?

RG I didn't understand that till you explained it with visuals.

CA I wouldn't say it's a rule. I'd say it's a suggestion.

RG For me I find that idea a bit depressing because I feel an artist's value is cumulative. I didn't live in a big city, I wasn't in London when I studied, I was in Manchester and at that time there weren't any museums or galleries in Manchester, so I only knew art through magazines and early internet (makes early internet noise). Dial up stuff, which was quite laborious, and I would have a yearly trip to London to go to the Tate. I didn't know where else to go. So I always saw art as an image, a caption, a text about it, a title, a view.

For me to be able to produce work and not exhibit work. I really got into documenting work, taking slides of the work and putting the slides in those slide folders and that would be... I saw it as a cumulative thing so you know like, works and the labels, when you have enough of them and there's a diversity and you can make an exhibition. Being an artist in another way.

And there's this other thing, which I really believe; the trajectory of your practice. So when we look back and we are 80, it was like that, I was up there, and left and a bit right a bit, so the idea that you are only as good as your last work...

CA Ok maybe it's not right.

RR: No, there's a truth to it, but if I followed it I would not be as productive or prolific.

CA Yeah maybe it's too much pressure on the present but it's also true.

RR: I might end up making blockbusters.

CA Because there's another...

Maybe I'm gonna walk back, I'm gonna be a politician, I'm gonna walk back my statement.

RG (Laughter) OK

CA One of my three tenets. I'll put a disclaimer on it because, yeah, you might be right. Current work is a thing, what makes the artwork good is

"I was really jealous of you, jealousy is a weird thing, it was almost animosity"

the next artwork and the previous artwork.

RG Yeah, like brackets or something. They contextualise it or don't contextualise it.

CA Because you can make a really great artwork, but if the things you've been making and the things you will make are terrible, it's hard to make a case for its greatness.

A good artwork is only a good artwork if there is a consensus that it's a good artwork. It involves other people. Sometimes the consensus it is a good artwork comes 30 years after it's made.

RG Yeah but if it was made then you didn't know the context 30 years in advance of everyone else so it wasn't a good artwork it just fell into goodness, see what I mean?

CA Yeah!

RG You didn't make it good. The world changed and changed the meaning of it.

That doesn't make you a good artist, just makes you mystic fucking Meg (Laughter)

When people say, 'what's your favourite artwork?' I'm always like 'I dunno'.

But which artist do you think is really good?

I know straight away, I can reel off a list, but all artists, all great artists make terrible work. I think artists who make the same kind of work every year, again and again, aren't very good artists. The whole point is development, experimentation, changing, pushing things forward and risking badness. It's like exploration and investigation.

Making a blockbuster that you know will do well on Instagram and be seen by lots of people and loads of people go and see, that's not being a good artist, its being a good promoter of yourself or something. It's something different.

"I'm gonna be a politician, I'm gonna walk back my statement"

CA What makes a great artist? Everyone's description might be different. I like people who get into really seriously gross territory, that's fun.

RG Like what?

CA Like really get into some gross areas. As an artist you always see it differently. Playing a long game, and if they're good they are always working a little bit ahead of people's perception and it can be really gross for a couple of years then people are like 'Oh I get it!' So it's a little bit of a game when your work is in front of fellow artists, because your favourite artist can really throw you off.

So things are changing, the remarks are changing, the work is getting good and when that happens to your own work it's really scary. It's like certain work becomes better and certain work become worse and you have little Zen about it. You're not really in control of it anymore, you only have a little bit of control.

RG I think there's a question that no one asks, and it's about true motivation, like actual motivation of artists.

I think we subconsciously do that in a millisecond when we look at art, but we don't verbalise it or talk about it. We never say 'What's their true motivation?'.

It's hard to talk about without naming artists. It's hard to talk about 'on air'. I won't name them, but when you see an artist's work and you think, 'Are they really interested in that? Are they?'

I need to talk about actual examples. Are they really interested in naked pictures of themselves with an erection? Are they really interested in expressing themselves like that? Or what is their true motivation? Is their true motivation to cause sensationalism, make something that would stop people in their path?

So I mean you can look at any art and we don't know, but we always ask what the true motivation of the artist is, you see what I mean?

CA Have you ever known something is really good? Have you ever just

known?

I thought I had, then I started doubting again.

The Useless Machine is a work based on semantics - the way we read things - and it's an explanation to the way we read things.

So in semantics traditionally there were Natural and Conventional signs so like, me seeing hair on your trousers and me knowing you have a poodle and you didn't look in the mirror this morning before you left, like Sherlock Holmes (funny voice) that's Natural. And Conventional signs are ones that we know in language, like art that's made, dependent on how they've made it and have made decisions about what they are going to communicate. A Roman Western typeface or the idea of a joke, they are Conventional signs.

They all communicate things. So painting is a Conventional sign not a Natural one.

So I wanted to make an artwork that was a Natural sign, so it was almost like an illustration of the convention within art, so I made a darkroom that you get in video installations, then a mirror, a pillar in the middle with some cogs that you could barely see, a digital counter, some flickering and some L.E.Ds that went on and off but didn't do anything. So it was like the systems that surround the framework that surround the production of what we traditionally expect art to be, but it wasn't that, that was the work. See what I mean?

CA You lost me there.

RG (Laughing) It's just a mirrored box with lights. You have to see it.

CA So everything you just said, you were hoping to communicate with the work?

RG I'm interested in talking about things that are art and things that don't look like art. Natural and Conversational signs because art is supposed to be the place you can do anything. It's the only place you can do anything, so why would you like, stretch some fabric on a wooden frame and spread coloured oil on it and give it to someone and they know already it's an artwork? It doesn't make sense. It's the same as surf-ware or any product.

CA I might argue with you a little bit. It does...it does... You keep going 'But I have to come back to painting', as I like painting as an idea.

RG I like painting as an idea.

CA It's like a chess game or something.

RG Painting is like one interest. One idea. It's like a tadpole in a sea.

CA But I think it's one of the biggest challenges and that's why it's interesting. I think it's one of the hardest things to do as there are so many conventions around it and so things are stricter and to innovate you only have this tiny little window.

I think it's really difficult. That is interesting. When you see a really new great painter and wonder 'How did they manage to do that as there's so little room?'. So it's like playing a very advanced game, right?

RG My dad likes painting. He does it on the occasional Sunday. He'll go into the spare bedroom, paint something in watercolour, camels, the sea whatever. He takes great pleasure in it.

CA That is a different thing





CORY ARCANGEL X ARCANGEL SURFWARE. ARCANGEL SURFWARE 2014 S/S/I/W SPECTRUM COLLECTION (MICROCENTER) PHOTOSHOOT. 2014, PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID BRANDON GEETING. COURTESY OF ARCANGEL SURFWARE

RG	I don't think it is. It's a selfish act. A painter takes great pleasure from it, but I don't take great pleasure in my work. It's hard, it's my job. It shouldn't be self gratifying, it should be hard. Talk to me about surfware. Talk to me about surfware.		to be an artist?
RG		RG	I didn't think I'd be an artist. It sounds horrible and crass, but to be totally honest I thought I'd be a TV presenter.
CA	Wait, wait one last thing...	CA	Cool, because you would be really good at that! (laughter). Oh my god that makes total sense.
RG	Let's talk about surfware.,It's a natural sign because surfware fits in the real world. It is not framed around artwork, see what I mean? It exists in the world .	RG	I used to see stuff and be able to talk about it in a non-pretentious, non-ellistist way.
	If you came across your shop and you didn't know who you were - an artist - it is a shop.	CA	When I see you on video, I think 'He's so good'. You are really good at that stuff.
CA	It is a shop. So I have a kind of publishing, merchandising surf brand called Arcangel Surfware, separate from my studio practice. It is a thing that exists in the real world, like clothing. We also make software.	RG	That's what I thought I'd probably do.
		CA	Up until?
RG	(Laughing) I love the way you say 'we', because that's such a corporate pitch already. It works.	RG	I was working at a carpet shop in Chester and I tried to get a job as a journalist at North Wales Newspapers as I thought it would be a way into media, but my writing was too bad. So they employed me as a photographer because I had a car and a mobile phone before anybody had a mobile phone. I wasn't from a wealthy background; I was given the phone by the government because I was in a wheelchair. It was about 6 inches by an inch and a half and it had a yellow backlit LCD screen, it was a Nokia. Weighed a ton. 4hr battery.
CA	Total disclaimer; at the moment it's just me. But I would say 'we' still. So we are gonna open up a shop-gallery in a small regional town called Stravanger...	CA	When were you an artist?
RG	Will it be art or real or both?	RG	You mean when did I think 'I'm gonna try and make art' a lot? Or when 'I am only gonna make art, I don't need a job'?
CA	I think it's going to be a real store and for people who visit the store in Stravanger it's a real store and they are going to buy things and whatever. For people who know a lot about my work it can easily be seen as an art gesture and it is kind of both. But I don't want to push the art angle too much as it's exhausting . It's annoying to pass this off as art at the moment, but maybe after two years I'll figure it out. But I like it now being outside my practice, there are no rules, I don't have to be organised about it, I can do anything I want there and it doesn't matter.	CA	Both .
RG	This again comes back to true intentions. Your intention is you have this thing you have a passion for, even to the point where you don't know if it's art or not. For me it makes it more art and more worthy than someone who makes something that looks like art that is trying to be art, because the consequences of that are that they are seen as an artist and that is what they want.	RG	I think I became an artist when it was my profession.
		CA	When was that?
CA	It's complicated. Art is a complicated thing, right? Art is only art when other people think it's art, or good, so to make that situation happen all these mysterious things have to happen. So not making something can make something more art. Oh it is just so complicated.	RG	That was 2003/4. I was doing three teaching jobs, in Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester, teaching fine art degrees and travelling around. I had a studio in London and I'd only go on Sunday. The thing that we all had; you had to pay for a space but you can't go to the space because you have to go to work to pay for the space. The studio - work paradox.
RG	What was your motivation then? Why did you want to be an artist? Was there a moment you thought 'I'm going to be an artist, I'm going to make art, I'm going do art'?		But then there was a gallery in the Netherlands that took my work to Basel and I won a prize and suddenly I had more money than I'd ever had. So I called up straight away... I'd won a prize and I called all three teaching jobs and said 'I'm not coming back'. Then I went to L.A., got a rental car and I lived in someone's weird bungalow / shed in someone's garden.
CA	It was pretty late, I'd already been an artist for many years, but not realised it, but then I was like, 'I'm an artist!'. Does that make sense?	CA	In L.A.?
RG	(Laughter) Superb!	RG	I didn't know anyone. I just went.
CA	When I first moved to New York I was just like, a person who made weird projects, and I didn't know anything about contemporary art and so I experimented with alternative comedy, with underground films. Or not experimented with; I participated in other scenes besides contemporary art. I had the things I was making, but it was unclear how it would fit in. Eventually art people kept asking me more and more to collaborate to make things and eventually I started to be an artist and at a certain point I guess I realised 'I'm an artist'. This was late 2007/2008.	CA	Why?
		RG	Because I had money for the first time in my life. I was like; I'm going to go and live in L.A.
			It was ace. The car that I got was a Chrysler Monte Carlo. It was big and red. I was there for three months.
		CA	So the show that I saw wasn't that much later. You made all that work... you made a lot of work really quickly. It must have been building up. It's like a band's first album is made over nine years and then the second is just a rush.
		RG	The second album conundrum.

"The whole point is: development, experimentation, changing, pushing things forward and risking badness."

RG	It's interesting, and that is why you are, like..	CA	It happens to artists too.
CA	And it's still quite a shock.	CA	There are so many more art schools now and so many more artists. The negative is there are so many more bad artists, but there are also so many more good artists.
RG	But It's interesting because, I think you are different to a lot of artists.	RG	Do you think there really are?
CA	But you...	CA	I think it's just a game of numbers, I think there's going to be more. I think it's a net positive.
RG	In terms of your motivation. Because if we were to ask 100 artists that we know, 99 would say, 'I wanted to be an artist as it looked like a cool thing to do'. You didn't want to be an artist. You were just doing stuff and became an artist.	RG	They are hard to find, need a better sieve.
CA	The work that I did was not considered art.	CA	Yes and it is complicated but I think, but I do think there are a lot of artists. I'm going to open up this art space, I'm going put on a show and I'm like immediately, there are way too many people, there's a lot of very good things going on. I'd never thought about it from the other end.
RG	...before you started doing it.		
CA	It was considered art after I did it. But you always knew you wanted		

RYAN GANDER & CORY ARCANGEL

RG

The sieve is coming; the sieve is a big topic.

CR

I give you a pitch, I think it's a net positive; it's just a game of numbers.

RG

But you get a lot of bad art coming through the sieve.

CR

I think it's fine. It's like, why worry about it? The way to see if an artist is good or bad, check up on them in 7 years.

RG

I'm a little bit worried about artists who do the same thing year after year and are really successful, represented by big galleries.

CR

I'd say it's ok as there are still a couple of good ones that are represented by the same galleries, the more people through the system the better.

The more the better. I'm trying to get really positive.

RG

Get positive. I'm just worried about the sieve.

CR

I'm opening up a shop where I live. It's Archangel Surf stuff, plus I'm gonna have a show maybe 2/3 times a year...

RG

It's what artists do, giving back. It's like Robin Hood.

CR

...and I'm curating this show for Lisson with Tina Kukielski, the Lisson Summer show in New York, that's gonna be pretty fresh.

RG

That sounds good.

CR

Another thing where there is a lot of good artists, and we've been working on it for a long time so it's gonna be fresh.

RG

That's good, that's exciting. How long have you been in New York?

CR

Couple of weeks.

RG

A bit of sun?

CR

Problem with New York is it's too hot.What you doing now? You have a show and I'm going see it later.

RG

I haven't seen it yet , I've been away. You know when you do a show and you just go away...you just saw it with your friends at the opening. It was like that, so I didn't really remember what it was like. I went the next morning. It was quite weird, I was a bit like Mystic Meg; I had a chair with snow and a snow globe that never stops snowing, and it snowed really heavily on the opening! And then I went to Sydney to do the Biennale and I built a 2,000sq ft landscape of snow. (Laughter)

CR

Where did you get all that snow?

RG

It's recycled Styrofoam that they turned into benches afterwards. They squash it all up and make park benches .

CR

So that bench will be art.

RG

Yeah, what do they call it, provenance?

CR

Melt down all your old work...

RG

I love snow though.

CR

...then you wouldn't need to pay storage fees. I guess you would for the benches

RG

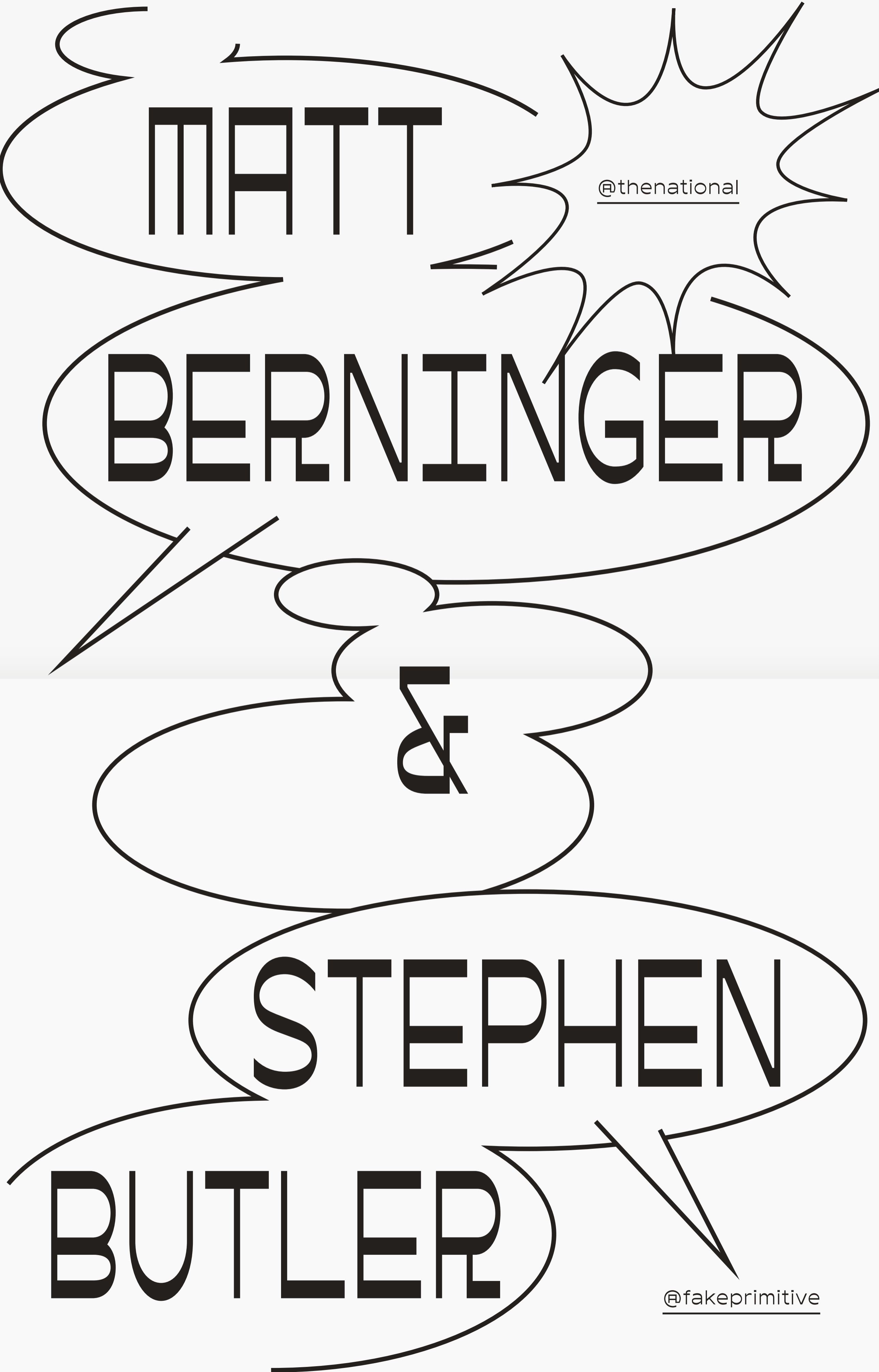
No you give the benches to a park, and as we both believe that art has souls that physical things are just vessels for ideas and stories, the bench could be a carrier for something it doesn't represent that's -it!



CORY ARCANGEL X ARCANGEL SURFWARE. ARCANGEL SURFWARE 2014 S/S/F/W SPECTRUM COLLECTION (MICROCENTER) PHOTOSHOOT. 2014, PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID BRANDON GEETING. COURTESY OF ARCANGEL SURFWARE

RYAN GANDER, THE USELESS MACHINE WITH BLOWING CURTAIN. 2013, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LISSON GALLERY





Lead singer of The National , Matt Berninger in conversation with artist Stephen Butler On the written word in music and art.

Matt Berninger
One of the first things I remember you saying to me when I said I was going to email you something, was, “Oh I don’t email, I just talk.”

[Laughter]

Stephen Butler
Yeah, I do talk a lot. I’m excitable and can be a bit overwhelming.

MB
After your accident, (Stephen fractured his neck last summer surfing) it strikes me as really, really interesting that you said the first thing you went to... is not speaking, but breathing, silent meditation. Basically your central thing- your thing - you suddenly stopped doing completely and went to what is the representation of the opposite of everything you do. And so you come up with a shape that is a shape that’s some form of a lack of idea.

And then your first word you manage to mutter in a painting is “UGH”, and then the second one is, “ER”. Which are all expressions of not being able to say anything. And this is just me trying to sound smart, but these are meticulous representations of the inability to say anything.

SB
my recovery was very difficult. I couldn’t sleep for weeks and I was really messed up. A friend of mine recommended the meditation app, headspace. I’d never tried meditation before so I gave it a shot. I was really struck by the effectiveness of just bringing oneself back to the breath. The breathing was a form of reduction, a way of pulling focus. Sometimes the whole picture is just too overwhelming.

MB
How often do you find yourself saying “Er” out loud

SB
It’s as much an internal sound as external. “ER” is just this way your brain is moving through thoughts, collecting what is necessary. Making the right choices.

MB
I just remembered this. Someone collected a bunch of audio interviews of me and took out every word other than “UH.” “UH”, or “UHH”. Which is basically just me thinking, me processing. And I can’t process silently. I just go, “Uhh..Uhh””. And so it’s about five minutes of me going, “Uhh...uhhh”. And I realize it’s the thing I express more than any other expression, maybe.

SB
It’s an expression of our thought process. And that’s where I get really interested, that we have these expressions that are buying us time. Because we’re very bad with stillness, or silence. If you ask me a question and I’m just like [SILENT], you’re like, “That’s weird.” And you’re like “Shit, did I say the wrong thing?” But if you ask me the question and I’m like, “Hmm...er”. It’s like a signal, “there is this resonant consent, I’m thinking about what I’m going to say.” Today Social media has created this kind of idea that you speak before you think- And it’s not really our human condition, that’s why we get ourselves into a lot of shit. There’s this kind of free fall, we can’t keep up with. And I like this idea of bringing us back to attention. Because I think what all art does, whether you’re writing a song, painting a picture, making a garment is... in that moment it brings us back to a sense of consciousness. Like the breathing in meditation. It draws your attention to being conscious of the moment.

MB
You mean like connected or mindful of the present?

SB
Mindful of the present, and when I isolate a word or a series of words on a painting... there’s a kind of filtering that draws attention to it. You know, if I put a single word on a painting, there are a couple things that happen. Firstly, it becomes an image in and of itself. So, I change the framing or the context. And you isolate it, because you are reducing to an essence and the viewer has an exaggerated sense of focus. As Moby says, “ it’s a comma in the storm. ”

MB
You’re forcing ideas... which opens up all new ways of ideas...I mean poetry is one thing. It’s a form- it has a pattern, it has meter, it has rules around it. And those rules cause you to break - to think in different ways. So melody and song have a drum beat behind it, then much less you put it into a studio environment in which you express that thing, recording it, the tape, or in front of thousands of people or by yourself? All of the context is forcing language to dance within weird confines. Or in water that’s not normal conversation, like we have here. This is kind of comfortable, conversational water. This is a safe place. You forcing conversation onto a canvas puts it into a different thing. Me forcing conversation or ideas into a pop song, well, whatever, we don’t really have any pop songs, is forcing it to be an idea... into some sort of presentation...

SB
Well, it’s a framework.

MB
You dress it up in a different way to make you think of it a different way.

SB
As a painter, I sort of have a physical framework to start from, which is the canvas. I know where the edges are so to speak. And, so, listening to your music, I’ve kind of always imagined your voice is that physical framework. ...you have a great voice.

MB
When we first started, I never did anything musical. I wouldn’t describe myself in any way as a musician, or musical in that way. I really cannot play an instrument. But being a big music fan, I sang along. And the singers I always liked were Tom Waits, and Nick Cave, and Leonard Cohen, and

SB
So, it starts with the music.

MB
Now it starts with the music. I don’t physically write at all. I don’t even have paper, I just sort of write things and mumble along in Garage Band and then I’ll have a Word document. But no words ever make it to paper anymore. I have my laptop open when we’re in the studio, so...I guess the framework that I feel really GOOD in, that inspires me to write better now... I mean I’ll cut it apart, but you know, they provide me with a warm swimming pool full of toys. And I just dive in and start to, like, cry or splash around. But a blank canvas in a room, seems sort of uninviting.

SB
Yeah, it is both an invitation and a warning. I’m quite impatient and I act quickly to not let the blankness intimidate me. I’ll spend a lot of time with a word or a shape floating in my head but once it sticks I act quickly. There’s a certain element of danger that I like...I think all artists have to find new dirt roads. Otherwise you are just cruising.

MB
Oh: And you’re bored as hell!

SB
exactly. With words... I filter language out of the world. I don’t see full sentences anymore. Words have always been images for me. They are part of my visual vocabulary. I’ve as much chosen them for their shapes and their colours as I have for their meaning. I read NO books as a kid, at all - I hated reading. Only later in life did I start finding a value in that. I would use words as shapes like, “Fuck, I’m going to put this word in here because it looks good” and we’ll just see what happens. I was just coming from a place

of ignorance.

MB
And let me ask you real quickly, is it Helvetica you’re using?

SB
It is Helvetica, I think. I think it is? I’m pretty unconscious to what I use.

MB
Well I mean cause it’s like the type face and the shapes of letters in Helvetica, that’s designed to simply not make you think of the letters so much, but make you think about the words specifically-

SB
The whole.

MB
These all seem to be...they’re unadorned, they’re Sans Serif- it’s a very meticulously designed type face.

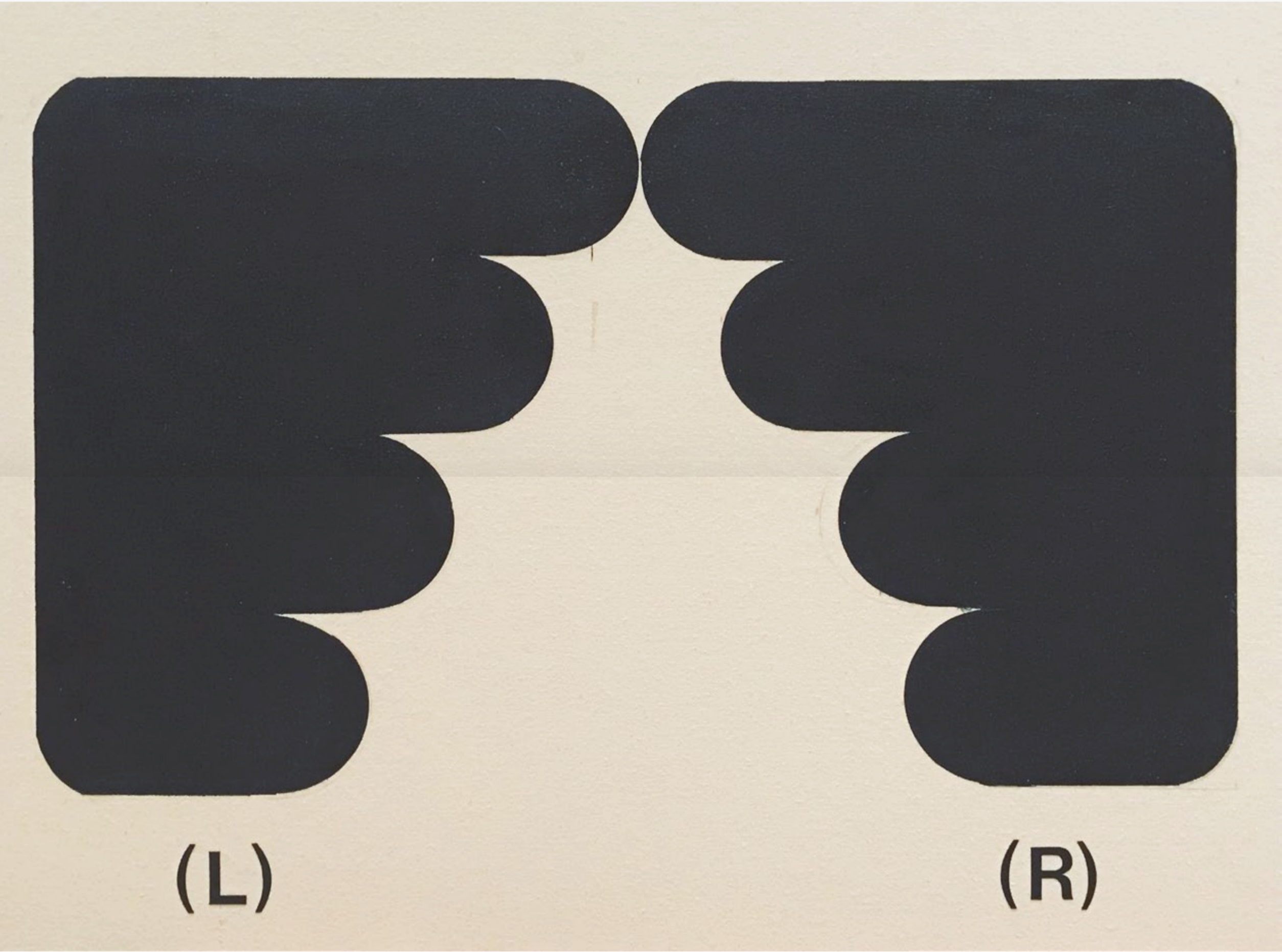
SB
It’s funny, I think I put more thought around the colours.

MB
Black and white, and then yellow, and red...

SB
I’m always thinking about how do I get this projection that I want? A bigger colour around how we see words. How do you see words?

MB
As sounds... I think now... I really think the first round of words, the first round of singing along to something and looking for melody, and looking





STEPHEN BUTLER THE FINGER POINTERS, 2017, LIQUITEX ON CANVAS, 18X24IN



for just something to grasp onto, is the sound and rhythm. So, it's words that have the right kind of consonants. Words that have slows and fasts... So, I would piece together sounds. So, any mumbling sounds that feel good in a rhythm start to sound... like it sounds like "I'm saying [LOUD MUMBLED]". And it sounds like something. Then words just start to automatically emerge out of the sounds.

SB So, they're born out of the golden mumble

MB But I'll do twenty-five mumbles – fast mumbles, slow mumbles, mumbles where I open my mouth, mumbles where I don't open my mouth, just to hear what sounds kind of weird. I often imitate other people's voices. Like I'll pretend that I'm David Bowie, and sing like David Bowie. Or I'll pretend I'm Bob Dylan or somebody and sing like them. All of them are tricking yourself into a way of thinking – thinking beyond what we present on the surface. It's like when we go out for Halloween, people are their most honest, or like in these weird moments –

SB Absolutely. Disguises can be very revealing.

MB So musicians and painters are in some ways very private, but are also total peacocks, right? I mean artists of all kinds are because they have to find new ways of tricking themselves into saying what's authentically in their heart and soul.

SB To be honest is really fucking hard. So, you almost have to self-inflict this trick. The painting, "I'M NOTHING LIKE MONEY" is a self-portrait. It's a painting about my relationship with money, something I'm very uncomfortable with. It is something quite revealing dressed up as a painting. It's a way of self publishing.

MB Well I want to ask, also, obviously you've done a lot of different types of work. But recently you had the accident, Donald Trump became president – not to bring that up, but speaking of words, it seems to me that there is a basic back to the building blocks of what it is you're trying to say. I guess what it is you want to say while you're still around, while you still can say anything. Right. It's like you scratched the record, stopped everything, and then the first thing you started painting is a nonverbal...

SB Space.

MB Space, but used in the forming of language, and how to articulate. And so your first thing is to articulate nothingness.

SB Yes it is a way of creating a clearing, a way of moving forward again. Like a path.

MB Yeah.

SB Not to digress but it's interesting you brought up Trump in a conversation about words. Whether we like it or not he understood the power of words as images. You know, so when he used words like "The Wall", "people were like, "I can see a wall." Or "Lock Her Up" – he's very good at manipulating this new visual culture with words

MB And he would nickname people, he would give them or stick hurtful words to attach to people-

SB Right. So he's used words in an age when all the rhetoric will say we are moving away from words. Words as pictures

MB "Crooked Hilary" is such a visual.

SB Yeah, you know what I mean? He painted words. He just really kind of unlocked the power of visual language again, and rhetoric. And it's interesting how he transcends intellect with something basic.

MB In the opposite way that maybe Obama also unlocked language and rhetoric in some ways.

I'm a big Obama fan. But it's true, from someone who is pretty masterful with words in one way, to someone who is very masterful with words in a WHOLE different way.

SB We are also accelerating so dramatically into a visual world. we're drifting back to a language of glyphs and pictures.

MB Have you seen Arrival? The movie Arrival?

SB I did!

MB With the ink blots, and it's all just early primitive typography

SB Exactly. language, operates in these kinds of cycles. I think in some way, without being over dramatic, I think we are reaching the end of articulation. And I think that is not a bad thing. In many ways articulation is at the heart of so many of our social injustices. It underpins class, race and most destructively is the foundation of privilege. Coming back to Obama and Trump. Obama was highly articulate both intellectually and emotionally but that did create a disconnect that Trump exploited. Trump is the opposite, almost bordering on the inarticulate, it's very unthreatening to the base whilst veiled for the most part as threats. By framing words as a painting, and creating them as an image, in a way I am in-articulating them, it's almost a way of preserving something that appears fragile which are words themselves."

Are words indestructible? We've got kids. They're all growing up in an incredibly visual world which is in one way very democratic. I'm intrigued, as a songwriter, a writer of words, or mumbles, how do you sleep at night?

MB Well, it's funny, you said something earlier that you didn't like to read. And I didn't like to read either. Some of it was because I found out in my late thirties that I needed glasses my whole life. You know, and so I think reading always made me tired But then I became an artist. I didn't like to put words down on paper. I didn't like to have to put them into some sort of form that most writing was taking place. I think Tom Waits was really the guy in the cave, that like, [GRSP]. It's more than entertainment. Look what's going on here in terms of how he slew those words together. Then the significance of rock and roll and music for me then really did become central to the words. And I couldn't separate the two. So, anything that I listen to more than ten times ever it has to be well written. So weirdly, words were not my thing until I found a way to love words through music. And I also was a graphic designer, and I studied typography, and I did hand painted letters, and I know how hard and long it is to..I mean, I don't know what your process is and stuff like that for painting these things – I won't even ask. But these are meticulously rendered, and it must be a pretty slow process.

SB The process is often painful. But there is a reward of going through the process.. but I want them to still appear as paintings. I don't want them to appear mechanical. When you look closer I want you to see the imperfections, the brushwork. No matter how precise they appear I like the reveal of imperfections.

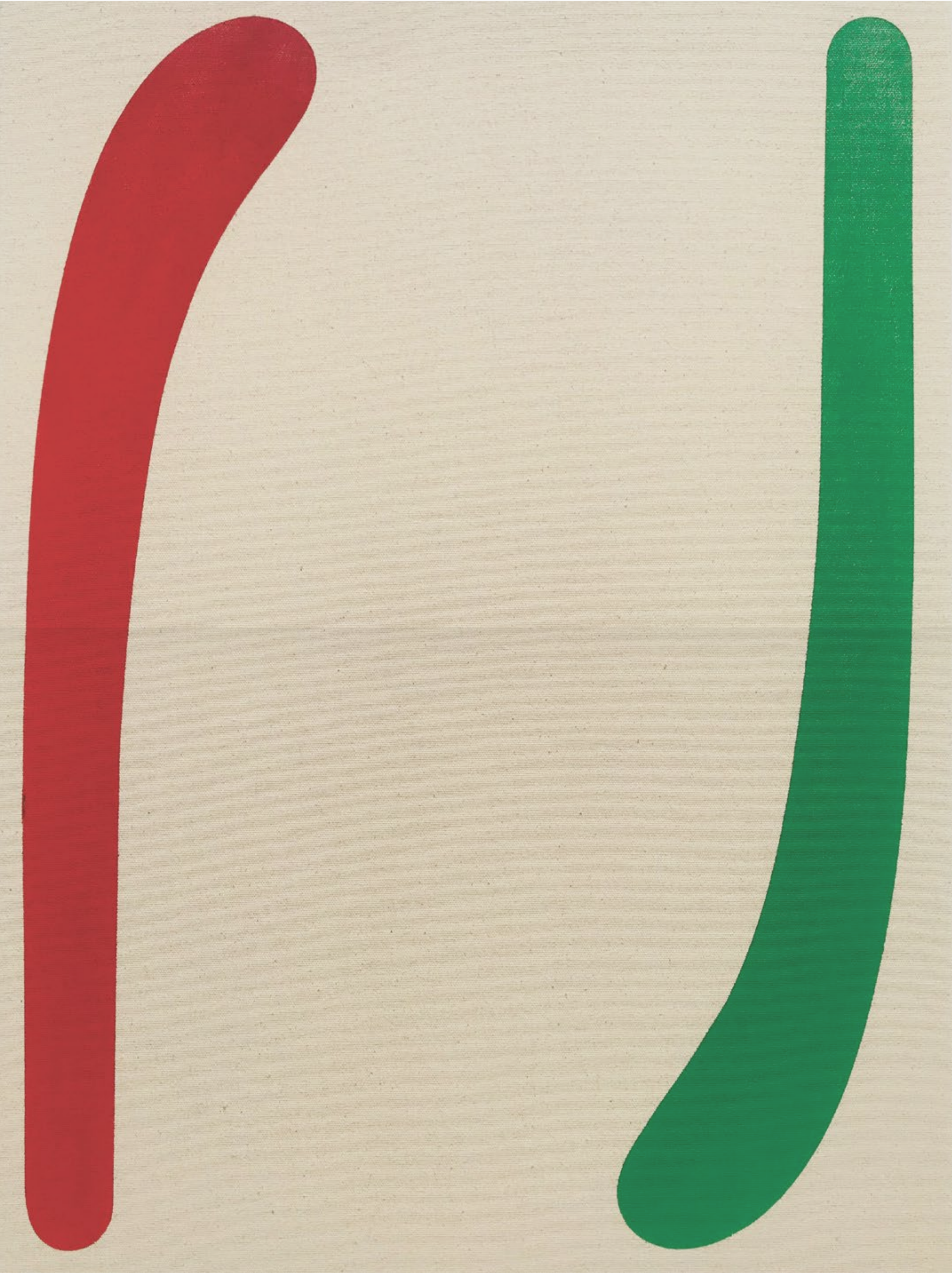
MB Well, it's like your stuff on the surface.. and this is one thing I wanted to ask you about too.. so much of the work that you're doing, looks like it's all trying to pose as something more than what it is. So for example, like, these guys, (points to foam sculptures) they look like rock – like they're made out of stone, but they're made of something very temporary, very non-lasting. Yet a word like "Er" or "Ugh" is like an uttered...





STEPHEN BUTLER PARTS OF SPEECH (ER), 2017, LIQUITEX ON CANVAS, 11X14IN

STEPHEN BUTLER PARTS OF SPEECH (UH), 2018, LIQUITEX ON CANVAS, 11X14IN



STEPHEN BUTLER PARTS OF SPEECH (RED AND GREEN), 2017, LIQUITEX ON CANVAS, 18X24IN

"There's this kind of free fall,
we can't keep up with"

SB It's a dismissed word.

MB It's a dismissed word. Let it's rendered as a painting. Which is what we think of...a painting is something archival that you save forever, that will last forever, valuable. But they're so clearly painted, and so there's something charming about it- it's almost like a child trying to dress up, or trying to hide behind a plant, where you can so obviously see, and they really believe that they are hiding, that no one sees them. And, so, there's something about these works – there's something humble about the paintings. And yet It's doing its best to be significant.

SB yes I like this idea of testing the ground you're standing on. What is stable and what is unstable. There is so much instability around, so much questioning of things, all forms of information have become questionable...

You're putting it into a form that we are told, and that we have gotten use to saying this is something to be valued. You know we're in a weird medium where all we're trying to do is put a little scratch in the universe, a little dent that says we are here and maybe pushes the universe in a way that is better than the other direction. And, so, we put things into forms, like art forms, like paintings or like songs because culture says those are valuable things. And other things, often times it feels like there's so little value in the back and forth – the communication that's happening. I think there's a real desperate search right now. If you've got something that is a significant thing, that's the truth, where is it supposed to live now? Because it was the New York Times, or CNN, whatever it was-

SB Where the information, the truth, just the facts were. And so that's out the window, right? And, so, I think there's this whole sense of how do we capture truth again? Because our old buckets where we used to think "That's where truth is kept", the New York Times front page. We are told, some people are told that's fake. So what is truth, or the measurement of truth based on. We seem as drawn to this new factual fiction, I'm not sure how much people care anymore about what is true or not. They are more driven by the entertainment value. Truth is under real pressure.

MB Authenticity... I mean authenticity... the truth, whether the information is being told as truth- For example, music is filled with so much lying and posturing. Hip Hop, for example, filled with terrible stories of violence and posturing and stuff like that. Some of it's true, some of it's based on true stories. I mean, all music is filled with, sometimes you know sometimes sex that is beyond reality or romance that is beyond reality. But it's hyper-dramatized, so is the violence, because it's a way for the expression of the emotion, which is that big. So Hip Hop has so much violence in it I think because there is much violence in our hearts right now, and fear, and all that kind of stuff. I think the authentic music rarely actually rises to the top and is the most popular. But right now I think we have a moment where Hip Hop being the most popular sits right next to Pop, which sounds very often to be the least authentic, the most packaged form of emotions.

SB Should art at least try to make an attempt to be more genuine and more authentic?

MB I think everyone is literally sick. I think we're in a little bit of a fog of sickness of falseness. And we're all affected by it. But it is ultimately the sound of stuff, I think, that is a more clear, authentic expression -sometimes - than really well-composed words. And that's so funny because, well you and I have talked about cyber currency or whatever... mostly that we have no idea what the hell it is... [LAUGHING]

SB [LAUGHING] Bitcoins, cryptocutreny...

MB Yes. And, so, somebody yesterday played me a video of this guy trying to describe it... and he's just mumbling...(laughing)

But it so perfectly described to me everyone's idea of what this is. And, so, the mumbling and the nonsense sometimes...the blurriness of language in a song, the blurriness of language in poetry is way closer of an approximation of authentic truth

SB Than the clarity.

MB Than whatever is laid out. Sometimes that stuff feels like you get further away from the truth the more you describe it. So, there's almost nothing expressed in some of your things, literally nothing in some of them, or the most minimal things. Yeah, just back to the very basics of sound, or absence of sound.

SB Well that's a good pivot to something I wanted to touch on which is as much the absence of sound or sense of space. Some of the best musicians play fewer notes than you actually hear. They have the ability to play in such a way, and leave enough space, that your mind fills in more. This gets people kind of engaged. I think back to that blurriness, maybe, or that idea that not everything is precise and filled. The space becomes something very active within the piece. And I was wondering, as you're writing, or as you're listen-

ing to or talking with the band...how important are the spaces in a song?

MB Well, we talk about thinning out songs. Like our band is always talking about creating more space in songs. It's hard because we're a band where everybody loves lots of different colours, and everybody's got a paintbrush, and everybody really wants to get to colour. And so we used to layer and paint, but then we started getting really comfortable not only removing colours, but throwing whole canvases away. We throw a lot more canvases up, we throw canvases away, we start over. But in terms of space, we've desperately been trying to use less sound to say the thing you're trying to say. We're not very good at that, to be perfectly honest. If we were painters, as a band, there'd be a lot of thick paint

SB You're the Frank Auerbach of music.

MB Yeah, you know it's like Iggy Pop. Like, some stark, blood colours. But then you know, it's all over the place. We often talk in terms of colours. You know, "There's too much red." and all that kind of stuff. Let I would say we're still trying to figure it out, how to say less. So, we're on a slow journey to make less noise, I guess.

SB Let's talk about style. The art market is really designed around styles. Artists get caught in an economic trap that is very hard to get out of, it's hard to just mess about and be taken seriously.

MB All my favorite artists always try to avoid having a style, to avoid being associated. They will really try to undermine whatever they've got going for them, because you really don't want to be painted into a corner.

SB You don't want to be pigeonholed. But at the same time the audience is fickle, they put you in a place and then you don't want to upset them if you move from that space.

MB But that's the only time you're really an artist, I think.

SB Well, they make that journey hard. I think Bowie is probably the standout example.

MB Otherwise, you're a craftsman or a stylist – which is a cool thing. You have to humiliate yourself. And obviously we're talking about rock songs and paintings, nobody's going to get hurt. We're talking like we're skydivers, but we literally live in Venice, California. But it's also why art is judged so harshly, meaning people are so mean about art. And they should be, because artists are trying to kind of get away with being magicians, and not having to punch the clock in the obvious ways. We're trying to break all the rules for what you're supposed to do and say with your life and how you spend your time. So, people should judge us harshly for trying to get away with this.

SB It comes back to the privilege.

MB Yeah, so if you're not pushing...if you're not actually adding something that you think might be a candle, a little light or a way thinking about something that might lead a little further down the pathway, then you're just making the twinkle tunnel that we come back to that's fun for five minutes, but it feels-

SB Feels a little empty.

MB Yeah, it feels empty because it's not really genuine. You're not in a magical land. But If you momentarily can close your eyes and believe you're in outer space floating in some twinkle universe, or you actually feel emotionally, romantically moved by a song, or it makes you cry. Or a painting makes you start to wonder what's important about how we use language- anything that, for just a second, sparks a new combination of wires being put together- that's the difference between art and craft. And, so, you have to risk doing things that seem maybe silly.

SB Silly, yeah.

MB Rock songs and dancing around on stage singing about love is a humiliating, very, very easy thing to do wrong. And that's why people just excoriate artists that fall off the wire. Because if you don't stay up in the air, if you don't float, if you don't ACTUALLY levitate, then why is anybody paying any attention? So, you have to risk, like, falling into the abyss.

SB Well, I love that. It almost feels like the perfect conclusion, get out before we fall.

Were there any burning questions left on your list?

MB Just Things that were mostly designed to make me sound smart, which we failed at.

SB Yeah, I want to make sure you sound smart. [LAUGHING]



STEPHEN BUTLER PARTS OF SPEECH, 2017, LIQUITEX ON CANVAS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY EVA WÜRDINGE

then I bought art books. With this, I opened the door into something else. It was my world. It was my world where my parents and father had no access. They were fighting this world, but this was a freedom which was extremely important for me. Also, for developing. Your family, were they pro your artistic work or against?

PM I think they would have been. My father, he was from Dresden, from a middle-class Jewish family. He would have celebrated it, I think. He died when I was very young, but he would have celebrated it. My mother did too, I think. I was encouraged. I had no obstacles in that.

EW There's an interesting aspect for me. Because when I married my first wife, she was an artist, too, her parents supported her very much. This was, for me, very frightening, because this was my secret space where I could develop my thoughts and my work, or whatever. At the beginning, it was thoughts and my being as a person. If this had been taken away by parents, or conquered by parents, this would have destroyed it. Whereas she was so supported in a way that for me would have been far too much. For example, I never invited my mom and my dad to my exhibitions, to my shows. I wanted this part of my life to be totally sepa-

EW That's another reason.

PM All the family friends were German and the culture I grew up in at home was very foreign to London.

EW Was this the reason why it made you a writer? Why you become a writer?

PM No, I don't think so. Although I was a storyteller always, and I think of myself as a storyteller. Yes, of course, I write for a living but I was doing that anyway and had I been a good actor, I would have probably chosen to be an actor. No one chooses to be a writer unless you are really mad. Why inflict that much pain on yourself? I got to writing by accident, because I first wanted to be an actor. I was terrible. Then I thought I could be a director. But I could never find the right play to direct, because at the time I was working with students at university and all the available plays were obviously for people who were older. Therefore we had to put this ridiculous stuff in the hair of the students because I only had students to play with. There were no plays written for people who were 19, 20, and 21 years old. Then I wrote a play so that I could put it on with people. It was a means to an end – all I was

"There is such a big equivalence between the One Minute Sculptures and our time"

rate.

PM I really understand that. It wasn't the same in my life. I had a properly, healthy, secret life in my own head which was completely at odds with my parents, I hope. I think that's part of a healthy development as an individual.

EW But you said yourself first, you saw yourself as an outsider.

PM That's partly because I was in London and my father was not just German. We're talking about the '60s, when the Germans were the enemy: but he was not just German, he was Jewish, which made it double outsider-ness.

EW He moved to England.

PM Yes, both my parents were refugees so I was brought up amongst other refugees.

ever trying to be was something else – and the play won a prize and therefore I started writing. Not out of a sense of... It wasn't a vocation.

EW How interesting.

PM It was an accident, and I've never done anything since. I keep meaning to get back to the things that I wanted to do.

EW The same thing happened to me but in a different way. I wanted to become a painter but when I tried to pass the entrance examination to the art school, they put me in the sculpture class.

PM Why?

EW They thought I was more talented in 3D and in sculpture. I was shocked.

PM Was that a rejection from painting?

EW It was a rejection from painting.

PM They looked at your draughtsmanship and said, "He's not good enough?"

EW Yes, they said, "He is better in sculpting, he's a better sculptor." Because as an exam test we had to plan something in the court at the university and I made something totally crazy. I offered a sculpture work as an exam test and they said it's better than the other thing. This was very frightening for me, but then I started to think, and I took this as a challenge. It was not like, "Oh, my God. I hate this."

PM When you are a child and you don't have a sophisticated view... Although given that you say you were reading Brecht at age 14, I'm sure you had a very sophisticated world view... But if you're that young, obviously the idea of being a painter must have appealed to you. Something about the romantic idea of what a painter would be. What did a sculptor represent that was different from a painter?

EW At that time, it meant nothing to me. It wasn't simply that I hadn't read about sculptures. I didn't look so I didn't see them. They weren't a presence in my life. Sculpture to me was boring: grey, black, and sad. Dead.

PM It's true, isn't it, that in the mythology of art, the role of the painter is romanticised, the role of the sculptor is ignored.

EW Well, it's not true because look at Michelangelo and many others who were great sculptors. They're there, but never as present or as represented as the painters, it's true, yes. The romanticism, you're right.

PM Had Michelangelo not painted as well, he'd have been...

EW Yes, it's true.

PM I think it's true, too. I think one admires a sculptor. One goes, "How interesting!" But they don't want to be a sculptor.

EW Exactly, and it's physical, heavy work.

PM Once you think about, it is actually all those things but for some reason, one doesn't think about it. It's like an unsexy instrument in an orchestra.

EW That's a good word. Unsexy. It was very unsexy for me and I didn't want to be connected with this. I didn't feel anything. The joy came up very quick and very fast when I made my first sculptures. I had this longing to paint and to colour. I painted the surface with colours. One of the first pieces which I kept, I made a ball of oil paint. The material oil paint normally you paint it on the canvas. I scratched the paint down and made a ball with it like a snowball. It was a very simplistic painting and a sculpture at the same time. This I found so interesting and exciting. This brought me to many, many other things but it was a mistake at the beginning. It was a rejection and a mistake. It was coincidence. They could have said, "No way. You're better at music," or whatever. I took this as a challenge and this gave me a direction.

PM Let's go back to where we started. I want to know if, for example, the death sentence, when it happens, it's generally at 6:00 PM or at midnight. If I were to tell you that tomorrow you are to have the electric chair or whatever, and it is at 6:00 PM, would you do any art during the day or would you put your feet up or would you read or would you walk?

EW For me there wouldn't be a sense of the romantic about this. I would probably be totally scared. But I think the idea of a final art piece would be too connected to self-pity and self-esteem and therefore too imbued with pathos. And I think I would totally be fucked up and scared about trying to say goodbye to my kids. I honestly think I wouldn't be strong enough to make a last artwork.

PM Interesting.

EW You? You would go and write?

PM I would try my ideal day and it's a day that I can take with me anywhere in the world.

EW The ideal day is something else than the last day.

PM No, because you should live every day as an ideal day. For me, the ideal day is quite miniature. It would involve seeing my children of course, but I would wake up before them because I habitually do and I'd probably write for two or three hours and then I would stop. My ideal day involves only three hours work. I would ideally never work more than that but I would like to do that every single day that I'm alive. That would be my choice.

EW Why don't you want to work longer? Are you not able to work longer? Are you getting weak and less concentrated?

PM I just think it's rubbish after three hours.

EW It's in a way the same with me. Maybe not three hours, maybe it's four hours. I don't know. Maybe it's even two hours.

PM I cannot concentrate longer. I get weak, I get false starts.

EW I'm very surprised and I must say I admire this. You would be able to say, "I run my last day as I did my best days in the world." Now, that's strength. I would not be that strong.

"No one chooses to be a writer unless you are really mad. Why inflict that much pain on yourself?"

PM This is a ridiculous exercise, isn't it? I don't know what it's like. Almost certain I'd be sitting there rocking back and forth like a neurotic fool but...

EW I would be sick with fear I think.

PM Let's assume that I've been in there for a while and I've got used to the idea and I've made my peace with it to some degree. It's a ridiculous notion. I guess what I'm saying is, and I should probably phrase the question differently, would you do it even if it was unpaid? Would you do it if it had no shows of seeing it or not even a means to an end?

EW Yes, I would do that strongly.

PM The reason I'm saying this is, I suppose, is because I was telling you before we started about Paula Rego. I'm friends with her son and he made a beautiful film, a really wonderful film about her. It was from the point of view of what is it like to the son of an artist because his father was also an artist. He was a son of two painters.

EW That's a burden.

PM Yes. He's really made his peace with it and he understands that for a real artist, the primary relationship is not the wife, it's not the children, it is the art. It's an act of extraordinary selfishness and yet, to deprive the artist of that, I think people aren't open enough. I think that there are probably so many expectations of all of us to be decent human beings or there's so much pressure to think of yourself as a reasonable, attractive individual of balanced mind.

EW A lot of pressure.

PM There's a lot of pressure. I don't know. I think you could take a lot away from me and I would cope as long as I still have my writing. I don't know what would happen. I might be the happiest man in the world if you took away my writing. Maybe what I've done is chain myself to the thing that is the biggest challenge and it causes me pain, and maybe that's what I'm addicted to. I can't tell until I put it down, and I've never put it down. Since I started I've never put it down. My instinct is that you could take everything away from me apart from my writing and I would be fine.

EW I agree, but what I've realised is that to make art, and to work as an artist in a studio or in a little room or whatever in a hotel room etc. is great. But as soon as the piece is finished and it's going out in the art world, that's a pain.

PM Oh my God, that's true of course.

EW That's really awful.

PM I remember saying... I have several filmmakers I've made films with. They say they love this job except they wish they didn't have to release it.

EW Sometimes I have this dream that one day I will just work and not have to care about anything else. But because I had the fear when I started as an artist that I wouldn't earn enough to live on, I still have the feeling that I haven't earned enough to stop working.

PM But, you have.

EW No, I haven't.

PM Yes, you have.

EW (laughs) No, I haven't.

PM I'm telling you, you have. I'm telling you. We're sitting in an apartment and you could sell it and...

EW Well, OK.

PM No, I'm telling you, you have. You've become addicted to certain expectations of your lifestyle.



ERWIN WURM, DOUBLE NAVEL, 2018. CERAMIC, GLAZE (CERAMICS), ACRYSTAL (PEDESTAL), 140 X 81 X 45 CM

EW True.

PM You could easily give up. You could stop now. You’ve got enough work.

EW True, I’ve got enough work.

PM You’re driven there by a force. It’s important that you recognise that.

EW The thing is, yes, I have created many bodies of work now, and could give up, but I still have the longing to become better and to carry on making work.

PM Why are you still working?

EW Because I love to do this. This is my big problem.

PM OK. What’s the thing that? What’s the hate?

EW The problem is not the work but the world around it. This is in a way a schizophrenic situation. No?

PM Yes, I think so. Look, ultimately, I’m in less rarefied air than you...

EW What do you mean?

PM Well, I mean what I do is supposed to be seen by a lot of people and, in fact, some people measure it...

EW You are seen by many, many people.

PM Yes, but the business of releasing it and then the scrutiny or the judgment, and sometimes just the very circumstances of a release can be so... You can have such bad luck. It comes out at the wrong time, or it comes in this or that all the wrong story breaks that day and then suddenly... I would be happy doing it without an audience seeing it, even though actually what I do is there for an audience. As a result of this conversation, I do nothing else. It makes me think I’d love to see what would happen to me if I didn’t write.

EW You said it made you happy. It makes you happy to write.

PM For the most part, it does. No, the writing does but I’m...

EW What if it’s taken away, then you’re not happy?

PM I’ve never experienced what it’s like exactly. I don’t know. In a funny way, I’d hate to say of myself, “You know that Lucian Freud painted every single day, every single day, and he didn’t travel.”

EW It’s a great concept, yes. That’s good if you’re able to.

PM It’s a great concept, but it equally has... It leaves quite a lot of damage and destruction behind it.

EW It’s a mistake to say it’s a great concept, I think. It’s a necessity. It’s not a choice I think. Don’t you think so?

PM I think so, and I think it can be celebrated, it can also appear...

EW Bacon... It made his work even more interesting. Also, the mess, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, they were so famous for the mess in their lives, and their studios. Colour like this, thick and grumpy and angry and bad and depressed and everything. This was a part of the aura around their work, but I think it was simply their characters and temperaments. If it wasn’t genuinely who they were it would not have worked.

I say this because for some reason, I always thought, why did I start to make one-minute sculptures, short living sculptures? I hear myself saying because in our time, we are consuming everything, so much, and our time is getting shorter and shorter. There is such a big equivalence between the One Minute Sculptures and our time. Another truth is that I am a nervous guy and I make things quick and fast. This was also the reason why I came to the One Minute Sculptures. I had an idea and I wanted to immediately solve it and immediately do it like this. So it seems that it was a direct expression of my temperament.

PM Which masqueraded as a criticism of the very thing that it was a characteristic of.

EW Sorry?

PM It manifested as a criticism and you posed it as a criticism, of you said... You were being critical of disposable culture in which time is this and yet it was a manifestation of your own impatience.

EW Yes, my own impatience, which is also the impatience of our time.

PM I think so. I think it’s often the thing one is most critical of, is the thing one most embodies in oneself. There was a famous story in... I can’t remember. There are various providences of the story But there was an artist, I think it may have been an actor or maybe he was a musician. Then there was a critic who was obsessed with him and would write these savage critical attacks. The artist would then do this and the critic would attack and then the artist would show and the critic would attack. Then it transpired that they were the same person.

EW (Laughs) What an idea!

PM I know it was a Canadian author called Robertson Davies who put it in, I remember it was a character called Revelstoke, but I know it was based on a real character. It turned out that one particularly famous artist turned out to be the savage critic that was obsessed by destroying him.

EW (Laughs) I’ve never heard that.



ERWIN WURM, FAT MINI, 2018 MIXED MEDIA, 138 X 180 X 340 CM



ERWIN WURM, UNTITLED, 2019, POLAROID IMAGE, 56 X 64, 85 CM

PM Is there criticism of you? Which I haven't read, by the way, but I'm assuming that at some point, you've experienced criticism?

EW Sure, especially in Vienna.

PM Really?

EW This happens mostly where one lives. Yes.

PM Is there a part of you that agrees with the criticism? Could you have written it?

EW When criticism is good, then I try to learn something from it. I think maybe it's true or maybe I'll look at this from the same or from a different perspective. There's a difference between a good smart criticism and attacks where people just want to put you down. I don't know how to write this kind of thing.

PM Discouraging or they're...

EW What I also found interesting, I read about Ulysses, about James Joyce that he was writing his own good critiques using a synonym for magazines, for newspapers in England. Did you know that? I'm sure you know that.

PM I didn't know that.

EW I've read recently about it and I was so surprised.

PM I think that was tragic. I think it's much more interesting that a person is writing his own criticism, someone writing his own praise is pitiful.

EW It's beautiful. (Laughs) He was supporting himself so much that finally, the group said, "He must be a great guy. He must be a great writer."

PM I guess people do that now though with reviews. They write good reviews and put them online and hope that it gets some momentum.

PM It often happens now, particularly in the film business, there was such a momentum to that opening weekend. If you get two or three key outlets that have endorsed you, they tend to be then syndicated in so many places that people then lazily read those and then copy those. Before you know it, you have a landslide. It's interesting that even when there's... Now, with the proliferation of media, it actually seems to only endorse a unanimity of view, rather than what you'd expect or just to see a greater proliferation of much more disparate views. I think it's because of this momentum factor. Jumping back, I think, I would definitely be a...

EW Did you ever do it? Did you ever write a critique about yourself?

PM I refuse to but people have asked me. Often, you read in the newspapers, you read the authors of critical authors and they're asked to review books and everything. I would never do that. I really would never do that. I was asked recently to do one, in fact, just two days ago for a prominent drama that just came out in the UK. I just said, "Look, these people are my colleagues." I just couldn't do that. I understand for a person... There was one particular critic who really took against me and my writing. It's unusual by the way because, in film, they tend to be particularly critical of the director.

EW Yes, of the result.

PM Yes, it's very rare that the screenwriter is targeted.

EW Screenwriters get Oscars, so why wouldn't they be criticised?

PM Yes, but no one remembers who gets the screenwriting Oscars, for crying out loud.

EW But you got one, no?

PM No.

EW I'm sorry.

PM I've been nominated many times but I never won. I've never won. That's my point. No one remembers if you have or haven't won.

EW You remember.

PM Yes, I remember. I can't say I'm... I've won enough other things. They're just different statuettes.

EW These prizes, are they for the others or for ourselves?

PM Both. In film and television, the process that's built up around it is so odious now. The campaigning and the...

EW I remember Michael Haneke always saying, "I don't care about the Oscar." On the other side, I know he was very proud of it.

PM Of course.

EW He liked it a lot but he always said that. Maybe we shouldn't go there. He always says, "I don't care about the Oscar. It's bad and I'm more interested in the golden palm."

PM The Cannes?

EW Yes, in the Cannes party. We call it a party.

PM Yes. Listen, it's a good problem to have. (Laughs)

PM It's true. Also, in the film and television world, how much goes into the campaigning and similarly for you, the way you say you hate the industry that you're a part of but you love what you do. I think we speak for most people in our industries who can feel that.

EW Let me ask you one last question if we have the time. Success What is it to be successful or how do you define your success? Let's say it like this: What is it? When the public likes your movies or your scripts, what is it?

PM My head is down so much. I am so lost in the day-to-day business of my work that I'm always shocked. I went to a dinner not long ago which was given for somebody in the political sphere. There were heads of industry and this and this and this. All sorts of what I would call very conspicuous leaders and influencers were at this dinner. I guess people asked me along because I think with Netflix, it's a real, what-they-call, a disruptor. It has disrupted the way which we're consuming film and television in as big a way as when television first came along. Prior to that when the cinema first came along. Every now and then... Every two or three generations are these big moments of disruption. I guess people wanted me there to try and throw light on this great mystery. This monster that is Netflix. What can I tell them about it because... At that table, I noticed how respectful people were of me and how kind they were about the work that I've done over the years. I went home and I remember thinking this is the first time in a long time that I've had some connection with my success. I work every single day and most days I'm so caught up in it that I have no sense of what it is outside. That dinner was quite different to how they would behave towards me 40 years ago, certainly. Clearly, something in the last 40 years has shifted.

EW Did you like it?

PM Well, I was very moved by it actually. I was really touched with it. These were people that I'm really quite impressed by their achievements. I expected to be an anonymous figure at this table. I expected maybe it's my own residual low self-worth, but I expected to be slightly ignored and marginalised. On the contrary, people were very respectful and were solicitous of what I thought about things. That's the first time I really connected with that. I said, "Blimey."

EW You've made several films. Very successful films also. You must have got a sense of success.

PM Not really.

EW When you made Rush. No?

PM No. God no. No one talked about Rush.

EW OK.

PM It's true. Or at least I'm not noticing that they are. Also, because I'm in my mid-50s now and I've been doing it over 30 years. I do think that if someone has in their body of work and I can say this only about filmmakers. If they have six things which are universally liked or universally well regarded... Regardless of success if they have six things then that is a major career. I do probably think I have that. I do think there are six things which I could put on a wall and project.

EW You number it like six.

PM I'm just. Take this number out.

EW I have a similar opinion I think. To have only one good idea as an artist is by far not enough. One idea gets you success and shows, and you fly high, but it's all downhill from there and then you disappear into insignificance. You need numerous good ideas to build a good body of work.

PM It's true. It's really true. Regardless of what I thought about their work, I would have respect for anyone who managed to sustain a career. Actually, the survival and the continuing to work at a high level, it takes not just a lot of stamina and stubbornness. You will in a course of a long career have what an athlete would have injuries or would have challenges. You have those as an artist too.

EW Yes. Absolutely.

ZHANG

ENLI

&

...at London's
historic Fortnum
& Mason store

NEIL

WENMAN

@powerstationofart

The Chinese artist Zhang Enli (1965) and his long-time friend and gallery partner Neil Wenman, Senior Director Hauser & Wirth met in the Crypt, a private dining room at London's historic Fortnum & Mason store, in early September 2019. Their conversation encompassed nature, the Scottish countryside, Zhang's recent installation of work at Fortnum & Mason and the idea of travelling with a destination of nowhere.

Neil Wenman

I suppose what is kind of interesting with you Enli is your move more into nature, because in the beginning the work that I saw was very much about the kind of memory of the countryside that is now Shanghai. But you've kind of changed that and brought it the other way around now - you are kind of bringing back the nature. Would you say that's true?

Zhang Enli

This project has made me recall many experiences in the English and Scottish countryside and these fresh experiences have made me want to bring back nature to the work. I think nature is very important to human beings. There is a lot of planned, developed 'natural' scenery around Shanghai in the suburban areas but they don't have any memories. At this time I'd like to focus on a combination of nature, history and human emotions, and also the feelings of a visitor or tourist. Every new environment is a challenge for me.

NW Also your work is really about all of this in a small detail. Like, I think of when we were in Scotland and you did the quartz ceiling at the Fife Arms Hotel. It was something this big gestures small size, that said everything. In the size of a stone, it said everything about how you thought about that part of Scotland.

ELZ I think there is a very strong link between the pattern of the stone and the landscape of Scotland.

NW Exactly. The kind of topology and the contour lines of the geography. It almost comes back as well to those pipes or the wires in Shanghai, which you've painted in the past.

ELZ There might be some links between the visual languages but it's not very important. What's probably more important is the stimulation from the new environment. This time it is a very fresh experience for me to exhibit in a department store. There are also a lot of risks - this is not a museum or a gallery. It's facing the general public; the work is very close to the people and it is not excluding them because they are not professional art people.

NW Do you feel exposed?

ELZ No, I think it is a kind of a combination. It's also an experiment with a new environment. The idea is to let normal people encounter art unconsciously. It's not just a slogan. I also want the workers in the department store to look at the work.

NW How does it feel to be doing that in London? Especially at this time that is so political in such an uncertain time in relation to politics and Brexit. Is that something you thought about?

ELZ I don't consider political influences in my work directly. The overarching theme for the work is the travellers. The traveller is a general term to describe one's uncertainty and the sense of drifting, and to describe our journey from one place to another where maybe you can only see the superficial things. I have a series of work called 'Destination', but in fact, it is a road leading to no destination, nor can you find where your home was.

As someone from China, I have only visited Scotland a couple of times. What I've experienced, and what I saw in Scotland must be very different from the experience of the locals. The differences and uncertainties will always be there in my mind.

NW Painting it on the Chinese newspaper print...tell me about that combination of the memory of a place painted onto the surface of, you know, the material you used to at home.

ELZ The newspaper represents 'everyday'. Maybe one is reporting the collapse of a building, while another one is about a car accident. It is a real reflection of everyday life. The newspaper is telling us that we are living every day.

NW In a way, for a non-Chinese viewer the newspaper is a series of events that we know nothing about because we can't read the text, so are you transposing various events or destinations onto these other events, these other kind of memories of a time, a place?

ELZ It doesn't really matter if people can't read the Chinese text. These are the traces of a city in China. If I were in London to produce a body of work, I might have used newspapers from London. The choice of material implies a kind of randomness or uncertainty.



NW Just simply from where they were made?

ELZ Yes. Sometimes the idea is simple, but new meanings emerge when you start to develop it. Even if nobody is talking about these pieces after a month at Fortnum & Mason, but ten thousand people have seen them, to me that is still very valuable. Just like if I picked up a book on English watercolour, it will remind me of what I saw about English watercolour when I was studying 30 years ago as a teenager. I think the green and the representation of nature will make an impression on people's minds; I will be very happy with that if that is the result. I think the external window displays are very interesting because it seems to be a sudden occurrence of art in this commercial premise. It is a totally different experience as it is a public building, a commercial advert. A traveller passing by doesn't know exactly what this is.

NW Maybe that doesn't matter. I am interested in the profile pictures on the stairs, they are a lot more abstract. They become a lot more about senses, maybe a mood or a feeling. You know they still have a sense of topology, but they are pulling away from the landscape. It is almost like you don't need the specifics of the memory anymore, it can now just be a kind of sense of feeling or shape. It seems to get looser and looser.

ELZ Yes.

NW Is there anything you hope that people will take away from the work? You mentioned that people might just walk past. But if they do stop and do look, what do you hope they see?

ELZ I hope to invoke people's memories about their childhood. Maybe a road maybe in their hometown, or a landscape or snow basically for them to recall their own memory about remembered places.

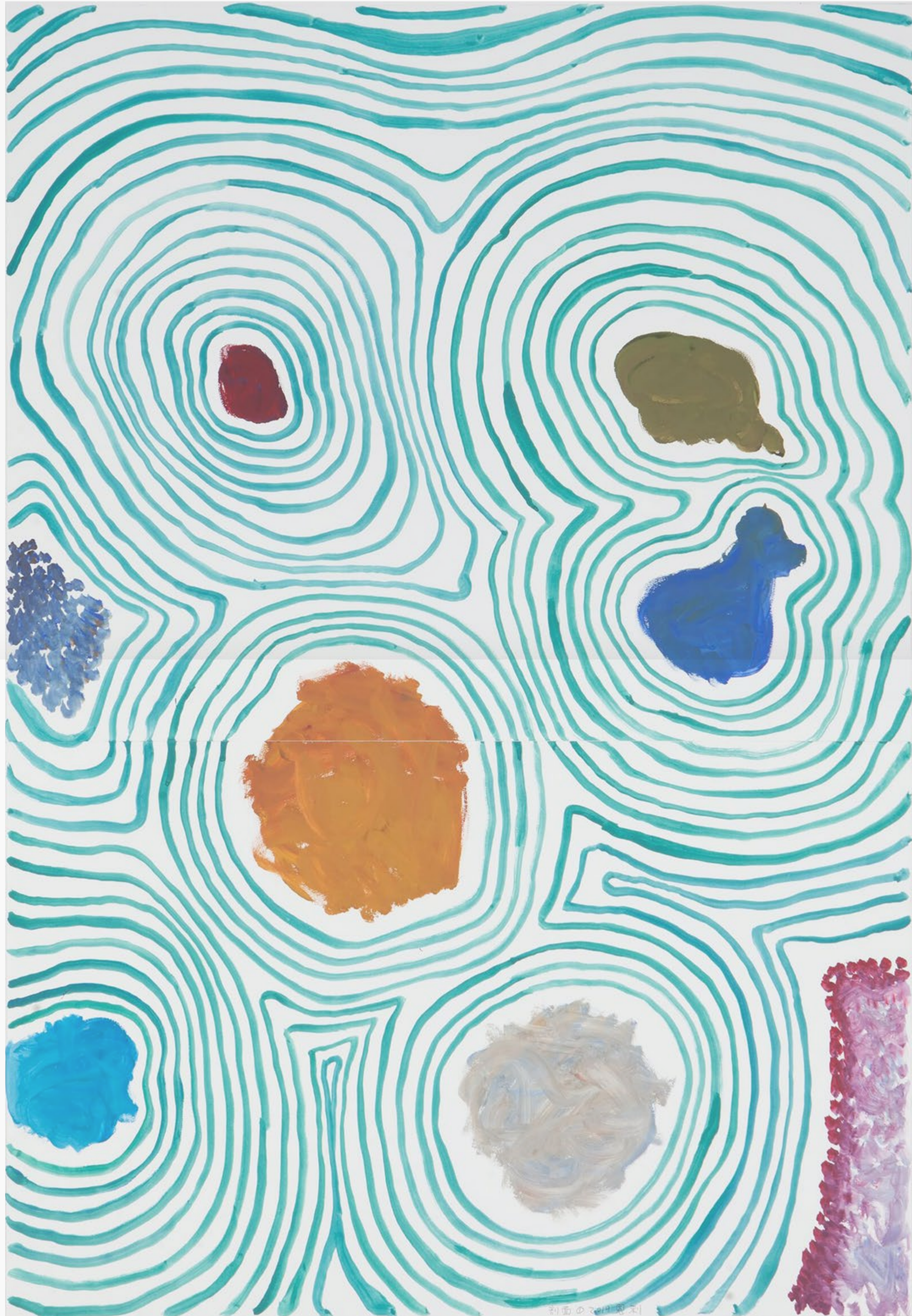
NW You talked about destination, and you go towards the destination but there is nothing there. Is that about an individual going to a destination or everybody, like humanity going to the destination?

ELZ It is a reflection of my personal experience, through looking into myself, but maybe other people can think the same.

#ZhangEnli @fortnums @hauserwirth. Zhang Enli Survey Exhibition end 2020 at Power Station of Art Shanghai

@powerstationofart @thefearms





ZHANG ENLI, 'PROFILE 1', 2019, WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER



ZHANG ENLI, 'DESTINATION 2' 2019, WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER

HANNAH

PERRY

&

@hannahperryhannahperry

ED

FORNIELES

@edfornieles

The artists Ed Fornieles and Hannah Perry met at Somerset House, the dynamic London arts centre, where Perry keeps a studio. As well as discussing place, loneliness and belonging, identity and fame in the art world, Fornieles and Perry talk about money: how to get it, the problem of not having enough of it, and its effects on relationships and social environments.

Ed Fornieles

So, we found each other in Montreal.

Hannah Perry

Yes.

EF After knowing of each other for a couple of years in London. And we spent two or so months together?

HP Yeah.

EF Very intense art making. For an art gallery called Arsenal Montreal.

HP Mm-hmm.

EF Yeah. Look. Where do you want to take this conversation? We could start there or we can go into what we were talking about before?

HP Don't mind. [Laughs, eating] I don't really mind. Do you want some?

EF No, I'll go and get some more in a minute.

HP Mm-hmm.

EF No, that's fine.

HP Well, you've been in LA.

EF Yes. So we've been doing a lot travelling. And then I find myself back in London. There's something, I don't know... There's like a legibility and fluency that I feel when I'm back here, which is fantastic. Like, going to alien environments is really amazing because everything... You know, you're abroad and everything is sort of strange and new. When you're in Europe, you're never quite fully integrated. You can't read people in the same way.

HP Oh God, [laughs]. Well, I always say that London's like a very bad boyfriend. It's, like, toxic and really bad to you, but you keep going back to it. That's how I feel about London. I really loved being in LA. I got to LA after you had left. I think there were some friends that I met there that you'd been friends with. It was just weird to trace...

EF To cross over.

HP [laughs] Exactly.

EF Same studio.

HP Yeah. Oh, yeah. Was it? And then we end up in Montreal. I feel that's how I feel about London. I was desperate to get away, and when I was away I missed it terribly.



EF How do you find LA?

HP Weird, but I like it, I love it, from afar. I want to be there right now. And I'm annoyed that I'm not.

EF Yeah.

HP But when I was there I actually felt really lonely. It's quite isolating.

EF I've had the best times and the worst times in LA. You can get everything you want. You just need to know the address.

HP Yeah.

EF But if you don't know the address, and you're not connected to a network of people...

HP Yeah.

EF You are so lonely.

HP Yeah. Exactly. I'd go four days without speaking to another person.

EF Yeah.

HP Easily.

EF I went through periods like that for sure.

HP I think I really started to enjoy it only when I knew I was leaving.

EF That's never a good sign.

HP I'll know I'm leaving in a month, I've booked my ticket, and then I'll start, like, really, really enjoying it. Oh, fuck. So, yes, that's the story thus far.

EF So what was the work you did in Montreal? There was like all the personal narrative stuff in there, I remember.

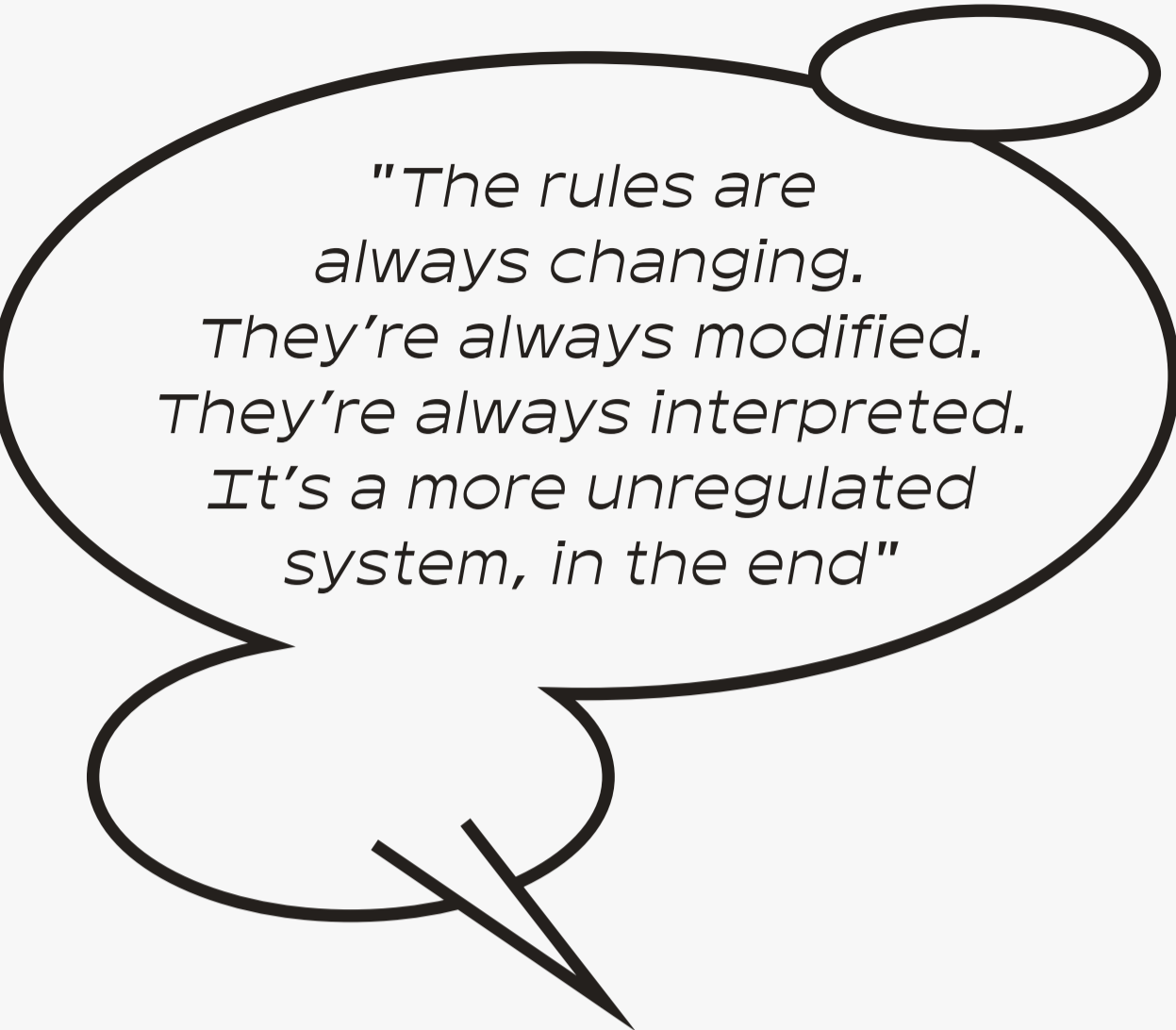
HP Yeah. I think it's probably the first time I worked more with personal narrative stuff. Which I still do now. I just made some big works. Humorous. Ridiculous.

EF Yeah. When you have an aircraft hangar to fill, you might as well fill it.

HP Well, one has to, one has to.

EF If I could just go into the stuff that we were talking about before.





HP Mmm.

EF Art in LA was primarily seen through the identity of the artist, whatever that might be. You were saying that you felt that pressure a bit out there.

HP Yeah, especially having come back to England. I felt like the work wasn't working class enough. And having been in America for a long time, where there is such a thing as class over there, but people don't necessarily focus on it or care so much.

EF It's forcible denial of class.

HP Yeah.

EF It's the American dream.

HP Yes.

EF That you could end up being in a position primarily through finance, whereas in England it's about where you're from...

HP Yes, location.

EF Education.

HP Your family.

EF Your accent.

HP The only thing I would say about America is if you do have a sort of Southern accent... Somebody told me that people with certain accents often try to lose them.

EF For sure.

HP To get jobs and things like that. But that's that aspirational thing as well, isn't it? The American dream.

EF Yes, it's interesting, the American dream. I think it actually predominantly exists in my mind anyway in the northern states and on the sea boards – like, it's not actually a southern ideal.

HP No.

EF If anything, the south has this conservative, much more English style...

HP Yeah.

EF And approach to life.

HP I remember actually, I did a show in LA and the guy couldn't quite understand who I was or what I was until he was like, "Oh, you're from the North of England. That's like the South here. Oh, you're like a Southern girl. Oh, ok, I get you now." That was his way of understanding.

EF That's so funny.

HP Yeah, it was. But that was his context to understand what I was trying to make.

EF But I really do think that this emphasis on identity is very much present if you're female or a person of colour, and the male gets to be very neutral within the art context.

HP He doesn't have to reveal much about himself. It's not a requirement. It's not being asked of you.

EF Yeah, there's a dangerous neutrality there, I think. That's something that needs to be addressed. In fact, the work I've been trying to do is trying to deal with all these identities around masculinity at the moment.

HP Mm. I'm obsessed with masculinity.

EF Yes, in your work. You were saying it before. You have the hardness of the metals, and then in the car you have a pink drill and loads of pink objects in this room.

HP Yeah.

EF Pink for girls was a Victorian thing wasn't it?

HP Yeah.

EF It's funny. And baby blue... So, anyway, we knew each other first from London.

HP Yeah. Just by going to stuff and saying, "Hello!"

EF Yeah. That's what I do love about London, that very solid network of human beings that you end up coming out with or being around a lot. You know, getting drunk with.

HP Mm.

EF They seem to become a very important foundational part of your life.

HP Actually a lot of people that were making the work from those times are doing other things now.

EF The drop out is very intense, isn't it?

HP I suppose we're talking about sort of 2010, 11, 12.

EF 12, yeah.

HP Yeah. I suppose around the time you were graduating, when I was starting my own way.

EF Yep.

HP And all the people that we were with at the time, which was a huge group of artists and makers and... I mean, it's not that... They're still makers and artists, but they're not necessarily in this world so much anymore. Like, I would say a lot of people have moved into film. And all of a sudden you've got no friends left.

EF Yeah.

HP "Oh no, where's my compadres?" So I suppose we were just around, really. I mean, you had a quite a famous degree show, which was kind of quite impressive. I wasn't there, but it was one of those where we had a lot of the same friends, and one of those things that you hear about constantly...

EF That wasn't big. I bought a house, like a double-storey house that was the site of an immersive performance around the American college experience... It was called Animal House, actually. But, yeah, that was the real start of my journey. I think in art there's a, there's a clicking, and for me that was like a clicking moment. Do you feel like you had one of those?

HP I think I've had a couple of those. I think there's one every now and again, isn't there?

EF Um, definitely. I was doing a lot with the LuckyPDF stuff. So that's another connector that we have. We were both working with some of the LuckyPDF people.

HP Yeah. Which is essentially like a TV show.

EF Mm-hmm. Yeah.

HP Yeah, and what was interesting about that was the fact there were so many people involved. I think that perhaps without that, I wouldn't have had so many people to identify with. That was kind of interesting because there were so many different types of work. There wasn't, like, you know, this type of artist. It was very varied work. Some of it wouldn't necessarily have been considered artwork. But it was all done through the lens of this platform. That was really quite interesting, to be involved with so many different people at that moment.

EF They came under a lot of flack because of this collective group thing that they were in. A lot of people were involved, and they were sort of cashing in on people's enthusiasm for capital.

HP Yeah.

EF Looking back on it, I think it was a point of coming together. Like it was a very useful device.

HP That's what they wanted it to be. Yeah.

EF Everyone involved.

HP Yeah, that's what they hoped it would be. I think the problem was it was sort of, you know, I don't know...

EF What it felt like... The problem is – and I had this as well – once somebody becomes very successful based on the collective practice of other people, then the contract shifts.

HP Yeah.

EF And the money. I mean, the problem is that I don't think money was ever involved in LuckyPDF.

HP No, it wasn't, really.

EF But there might have been the perception that it was.

HP Yes, I think so.

EF Yeah.

HP And perhaps it was more to do with.. I'm like, to be honest, Ollie [WHO] is one of my best friends now. And we met then and we had so many fights, like actual fights... I remember him calling me, well, he called me a diva because I wanted to be credited for my work.

EF Yeah, he was probably feeling bad on the details.

HP I mean, but that's just him. His ego went wild. And I suppose, you're in your mid-20s and all of a sudden you have this huge platform and everyone's listening to you and, you know, there's all these parties around and everyone's, you know... I guess it's just sort of, you know, you start to go a bit mad. Whereas he's still mad, but he's really a very, very, very, very creative, supportive, good friend of mine. But at the time he was a pain in the arse.

EF Mm-hmm.

HP And I was having constant fights with him all the time. It's like, "No, you must, you must call me an artist because I don't, I've never, no one's ever seen my work before. So if you put me down as a set designer they'll think I'm a set designer. So please, put me down as a..." "Oh, you're such-such a diva. It's just details." I'm like, "No, it's not details." So there were all these struggles at the time, but that was kind of, that all seems very infantile now. Even my reaction to it.

EF I don't know. I feel it's important. I think these conversations create who we become. And during that time I learnt a lot of stuff. I mean, art, essentially, is an experiment with no real guidelines. Artists are constantly doing things that other people, they might not even think to do. I work a lot with large groups of people and the immersive performance stuff. And there is a great deal of responsibility that goes with that, and there's a way of cheating people, and the right way of cheating people that has to be... You have to learn. As you said, Ollie's become a nice guy now.

HP Yeah. I call him up all the time. I called him up literally two days ago because he's into set design now. He's a really good art director. And he earns loads of money doing it. He's very happy in his excellent career. And basically, I'm calling him up pretty much every show that I do being like, "Can you help me out? We're not so sure about this installation. I feel a little bit about this. I'm not quite sure and da da da." And then he's, like, "Yeah, okay. See you Sunday." And then it's just like his free time. I don't know. Like, he's always, since the first time we worked together, however tumultuous it used to be, like that continual support is now really important to me.

EF Yeah.

HP It's interesting, that dynamic.

EF I think people on the whole, in England, are more inclined to knock success. But then there's something useful about the hardness.

That you can improve yourself in this environment means a lot, more than in lovey dovey LA, like, [snaps finger] "Amazing!"

HP Yeah.

EF I spent like a year in LA, and I remember coming back to Europe. And I got off the plane and started talking to someone. And they started saying stuff and I was like, "Wait, you're being ironic." I took everything at face value for a good 20 minutes. It took me a while to readjust.

HP I mean, it's just hard to know over a long period of time as well – how to, like, measure success. I mean, the things you do are essentially, like, small victories and massive, you know, deflations. You know? It's like, Ok, well this was a good opportunity, but these are the things why it wasn't the opportunity that I thought it might be. Nothing is ever fully a success. I never really feel like, "Yeah, that was the show, yeah that did it. Boom!" It's always like, "Ok, well, I mean, this could have been better," or, "This is how the work could have been better" or, "How could I have managed that a bit better?" Perhaps I thought something was going to be a bigger deal than it actually was. Or I thought something would look better than it did.

EF I actually like the idea of scaring myself with the work I make. Doing things where you're going to be like, "I don't know if this is going to be good, or absolutely terrible." I think that's where you want your studio to be, essentially.

HP That's exactly how I feel about this new sculpture I'm making right now.

EF Then good. That's a good sign.

HP It's literally like it could be an absolute load of garbage. And I've just spent so much money on it, too, doing it, but it's like maybe not very comfortable but we'll see. But it's also... I remember when Ceri Hands offered me the show up here at Somerset House. Literally, the next moment somebody was like, "Well, it's hardly the Chisenhale." And I'm just like, "Bloody hell!" You know what I mean? That's the sort of feedback that you get, especially here. It's like this weird kind of... It doesn't feel like a success, then, because there's so much sort of like...

EF I really like Ceri Hands.

HP She's great. She's just got the new head of curating or programming here or something or other. There's two now. Two heads of programming. She's one. I've known her since she was running a gallery in Liverpool. Like, I've known her probably for 10 years. And we've always wanted to do something together and then it was just that we were all suddenly in the same building.

EF Yeah. It's interesting we've talked about that kind of negative spiky aspect of London as well as this sort of loving network of friends that we had. I think that those bonds are stronger for being in a hard environment.

HP I think so. Definitely. Ed, what was the first time I saw your work? For a long time I kept hearing about it through word of mouth, maybe online. I remember the first show that I actually saw was, it might have been your first or it might have been your second Carlos Ishikawa show.

EF Mm-hmm.

HP The one where you had the vinyl in the entrance.

EF Yeah.

HP The first one. But before that I'd heard people talking about. There's a lot of people talking about Ed's work. A lot.

EF I had trolls. You know, trolls going around London attacking me for being immoral.

HP As you can imagine, I was like, "Who is this?" But I didn't see the work for a really long time. I think I'd probably walked past it in the degree show. The first show was your first solo show at Carlos Ishikawa. That was probably the first time I saw your work.

EF That was in 2012.

HP 2012, was it? Fucking hell. There you go.

EF I know, it's depressing, our ageing minds...

HP You got going quite quickly.

EF Yeah. So Vanessa Carlos, who set up Carlos Ishikawa, she started the gallery with me and the Lloyd Corporation and Oscar Murillo. The first time I saw your work, it was probably... I want to say the R.A? You were around. And obviously there was the LuckyPDF stuff.

HP Yeah

EF But it's weird, because I felt that just after the R.A we started coming into our own quite a lot.

HP Yeah. Yeah.

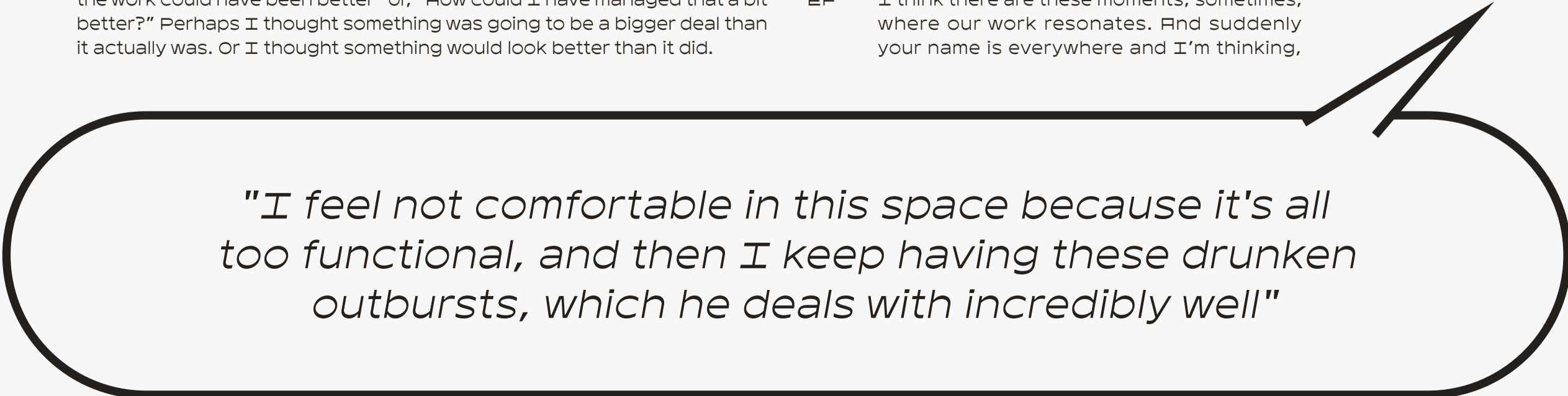
EF And then like...

HP Not doing collaborative stuff so much.

EF Yeah, exactly.

HP Yeah.

EF I think there are these moments, sometimes, where our work resonates. And suddenly your name is everywhere and I'm thinking,





HANNAH PERRY, TOWNER ART GALLERY, GUSH INSTALLATION VIEW

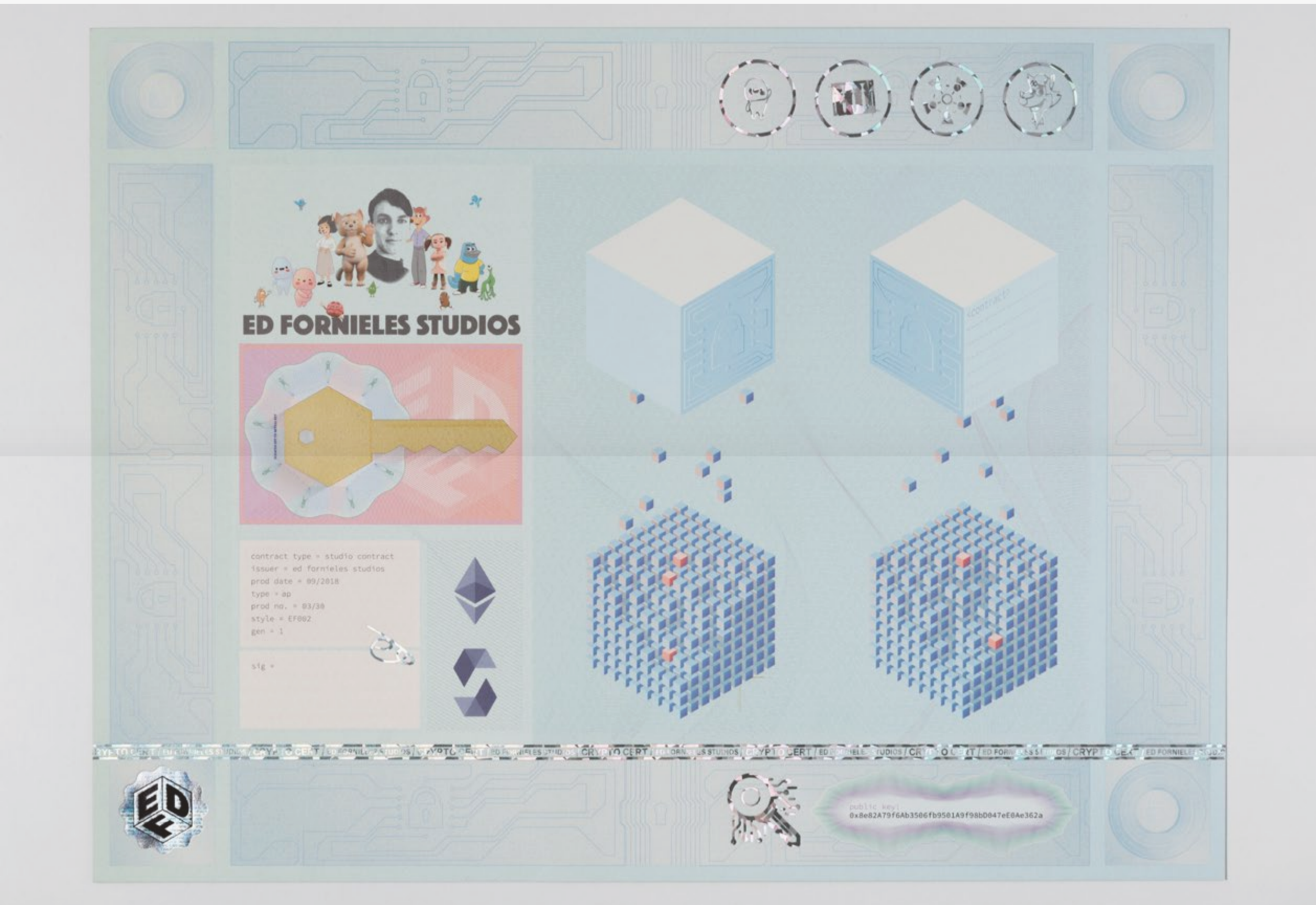


IMAGE COURTESY OF ED FORNIELES

“Oh!”

HP And then I moved to LA. And then then I come back to London and people are like, “What happened to you?”

I actually think that happens, and it's really dangerous. Because you go to LA and you get lost and then...

HP But the thing is, I was doing international shows, I just wasn't showing in London. So I was showing in Berlin and Montreal, like New York, like all these places. And then people all of a sudden are just like, “What the hell have...”

EF It's weird. Like, everything's seen from a British perspective. Everything. But then it's like you're literally just being seen through the work itself...

HP Yes.

EF Which is really exciting.

HP Yes, it is exciting, very humbling. It's a good thing, it's not a bad thing. I think it's good to go out of your comfort zone and be anywhere else. It's too easy to, like, swim around in the same pond.

EF A swamp.

HP A swamp! I haven't been to private views for a really long time. I went to my first one yesterday, because it was my friend's show. And not only am I just completely socially awkward these days, now I'm in my 30s. In my 20s, I was like, “Hey, yeah, woo!” Now I'm like, “Hello? Er, shall we get a beer?” But also, everybody seems to know everyone again.

EF It goes in waves – the generations. I think that's very healthy, that there's like a renewal of blood. I remember when we were coming up, like the generation before. I really think there was a split in art around 2010 or 11. I was in an age bracket where I could choose to be part of either group. I definitely didn't want to be part of the older group. I think that's about having a digital way of looking at things. But you need anchors to navigate yourself in an environment. And then there's the flip side idea of fake news – when anything can be a reality, everything's a story, so why not just adjust the story? Why not believe the earth is flat?

HP Yeah.

EF I mean, what is the truth anyway? And how does an individual navigate an environment and make sense of stuff? On one level, I really love the idea that reality is totally flexible and malleable and can morph and change depending on the stories you make and consume, and the stories you tell yourself. That's why I'm interested in role play, because it's sort of taking control of that process. One minute you can be what you consider to be a naturalised version of yourself, and the next minute you can create a heightened version of yourself. You can step into somebody else's shoes and perfume yourself differently in that reality. Do you find yourself fulfilled in your work? Is a role being performed?

HP Mm.

EF And is that something you work on? Or rebuild?

HP No. I think it's just... It's a little indulgence, I suppose. It's a space you think needs mining, so it's about indulging it until it's figured out in your brain and as a result stuff comes out.

EF You're growing it...

HP Yeah. Exactly. Or figuring out exactly what it is. I don't know. I don't really know what to say about that. It's definitely not a considered role in that sense. It's more like, every time I'm making something, like this whole class stuff. Now I'm feeling pulled into a space where I have to engage with that, and I'm trying to figure out what it looks like, and it always starts with a problem, doesn't it? So it's like, what's the problem? And then you figure out what the problem is by making the work, and it's almost like then you can go past the problem, and then just see it off.

EF Just...

HP Yeah, just sort of move on from that. But I feel like I'm sort of being pushed into the corner with this class stuff now, and that's becoming a problem. So now that's probably the thing that I have to mind. I went home just before Christmas and I saw a friend who I haven't seen for years who is a plasterer. He used to be a good friend. He had no aspirations to leave where we're from, and why should he? I was always like, “Move to London. It's so sick. It's great. Like, da da da. You know you can be anything you want.” And he's just like, “I'm happy!” You know, whatever, we're living very different lifestyles, and then when I went back there, what was kind of really nice is he had all these amazing stories about, you know, all this credit card fraud, and going to Thailand with the money, and they were there when the tsunami hit and they were all really high and all of these hilarious stories. But what struck me most was he was like, “Oh, I really want you to come and meet my kids.” He's got loads of little kids now. And his whole demeanour has changed. He's a father, and he's completely devoted to his kids, and he was just, like, “I just want you to meet them.” It's a very big part of his life. He was like, “I really want you to meet them.” And I thought, that might be quite nice, that's interesting to me as a piece of work. I'm more interested in going to see my ma, or meeting my mate's kids. That could be a way of understanding something, class. But then my boyfriend, who is incredibly middle class – it's totally fine, no judgements – but he was like, “Oh,

yeah, that's what people want to see, though. Somebody with their six kids...” And I'm like, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, like, why are you saying it like that?” It's just his way. That's the disparagement. The prejudice. I just want to... That would be a really nice film, wouldn't it? Me going to visit...

EF Yeah.

HP Just as an idea. Like, it's not like some kind of, “Right, I'm gonna go and socially...”

EF No matter what you do, people will be cynical about it. There's always gonna be that.

HP Yeah, but that's why I don't wanna...

EF Well, I think if your films are abstract enough, you can kinda do what you want almost. You should do what you want.

HP Yeah. Yeah. But I don't see it like that. That's not what I see when I hear that story. I don't see somebody with six children being an issue. Why is it like that? Because it's a person who is a plasterer who has six children? They're a lovely family.

EF It's interesting how, yeah, you move away. I always felt like, I'm getting the hell out of my rural life! But you unwittingly sacrifice a lot.

HP Yeah, a lot of understanding, I mean there's pros and cons, aren't there. The pro is – the world becomes this limitless space that you can explore and play and run around in and find whatever you need to. Whereas at home, the narrative is already kind of set out. You kind of know what that looks like in 10, 20, 30, 40 years time. It's a set narrative, but there is function there.

EF Yes, there is a structure to it. There is utility and support. It's the support network. The parameters to success are plainly different.

HP I'm having some crisis now because, obviously, like you know, as a woman, you know, you have the physical tick tick ticking, and I'm definitely feeling that, not just as a societal pressure but, like, my actual body – I'm not going through the menopause or anything – but I do feel there's certain... There's that. But then if I did do anything about it... Like, right now, I've just moved in with my boyfriend and it's a really nice flat and he's very terribly middle class...

EF So you're going to ruin it.

HP Well, yeah, that would ruin it. But, no, actually, it's almost like this is all running a bit too smoothly here. I feel not comfortable in this space because it's all too functional, and then I keep having these drunken outbursts, which he deals with incredibly well, but it's just like, Well, I've just been incredibly uncomfortable with this function... Like, we live next to a primary school, and there's all these yummy mummies passing by and they are all younger than me and I'm just, like, ugh, you know, walking by, ugh, crossing the street, and I'm smoking a fag and I don't know. It's just...

EF You can have a baby at 55 now, because you can freeze your eggs and all that stuff now, can't you?

HP I'd do it now if I didn't have to fit into that functional space where it's like... Actually I wouldn't have to. I'm an artist. I don't have an outward-facing client. I could take my kid anywhere. I can be self-sufficient in that way. But the problem is, there's not just me to worry about. There's my partner and he has a much more functional idea of it, so it's like constantly negotiating that. Yeah, I don't know. He works for the telly, so you know it's much more...

EF Well, I mean, that's amazing that you have a partner who has the stability of a job. Holy shit.

HP Yeah. I know, I know. When I met him, I was like, “Oh my God. He's got a job. Fucking hell.”

EF Yeah. They're amazing those partners.

HP I don't mind.

EF Even though, you know, we're doing okay, I don't know how you feel, but survival can be really hard month to month. Like sometimes you're doing great and other times you're like, “Holy shit.”

HP Yeah. Exactly.

EF When you hear someone's sold their show for half a million pounds, you think, “Fucking hell.”

HP So, half a million. They take 50%, so that's like quarter of a million. Break that up over X years of production, everything's shared.

EF Everything shipped out there.

HP Everything shipped.

EF Yeah. He's paid for the studio for two years.

HP Yeah, probably a big expensive studio. Probably ends up with like...

EF Paying people.

@richard_russell

RICHARD

RUSSEL

&

TOBY

@simonleegallery

ZIEGLER

EVERYTHING IS RECORDED, 2018 HACKNEY ARTS CENTRE, SAVOY CINEMA, LONDON



Richard Russell producer and musician and Toby Ziegler artist at Toby’s studio in Kilburn London having a conversation about their work together, mistakes, and digital with analogue.

RR If it is really highly rated, I feel there is a monstrosity that goes with that, a monstrosousness that goes with success.

TZ At an individual level?

RR I don’t think people achieve it totally by accident and whilst people don’t have it at the forefront of their minds. People will pursue the work creatively first and then the success comes if they do it well. But I still think there is something monstrous in success that is connected to the success.

TZ When you talk about the work existing as some pure thing it all seems a bit nonsensical to me, because it’s not one work if no one sees or hears it. It’s a conversation and surely you want to be having that conversation with someone, not just having it with yourself?



So I think it’s a bit of a tangled thing, like ego and adulation, but at the same time you want to be in a conversation with the society you are part of, you want your work to be useful for the times that you are living.

RR Are there a lot of visual artists who are discovered when they are older?

TZ Yes there are but usually they’ve have had some level of recognition at some point, I mean it’s quite hard to keep going if absolutely no one gives a fuck, but there are quite a few artists who don’t peak till later or have a purple patch much later on in their life.

RR I mean it wouldn’t really make any sense with visual art or music if you only get to be good when you were young.

TZ It would make more sense that you could only be good if you were old.

Youth culture is still pretty young though?

RR The whole thing in itself? Yes, sure.

TZ That might explain why there are not so many 80 year old musical legends knocking about, but I also suppose a lot of them die.

RR I also think a lot of older musicians stop developing; they get into the whole repetition thing. The legendary bands go around playing their hits, they are capitalising on the music they produced when they were young.

TZ I don’t know if there is a musical equivalent of a museum? As an artist you want your work to end up in a museum because it is visible to lots of people and it’s not part of any market. It’s a fairly innocent space where people can go see work and no one is immediately trying to sell it. But there is also this idea that the museum is the death of the cultural object, like culture, if you think about bacteria, culture being this thing that is alive, a kind of climate, as soon as you put something in a museum you are taking it out of context and to some extent it becomes this secluded thing; it stops being part of that climate.

RR ‘Museum piece’ has always been an insult in music, not necessarily in

a way that is useful anymore...

TZ Also I think museums are changing now. It is not the same as it was 100 years ago when they had these clinical spaces that displayed objects.

But changing the subject, it was very exciting to collaborate with you on this project

[Toby and Richard worked on this art/music project Everything Is Recorded earlier this year at Hackney Arts Centre, Savoy Cinema]. I’ve done several projects that have taken the work out of the gallery context, a different context, and a different space. But what we did was more than just a space, it was a set of conditions with a social element, it was a massive collaboration between lots of people.

RR I think it introduced us to something that was ‘site specific’. That is not really a thing for musicians. My record was also site specific; I didn’t know I was making that record, I just knew I had a space that was different to any space I’ve had before, with more room for musicians and in a private yet central location, so a lot of people came through.

TZ We found this space specifically to do the project. Projections upstairs from a CCTV feed from downstairs, where I made this installation, also the stage. In the daytime when the band were rehearsing there you could come and watch the live feed upstairs and in the evenings they opened up the space downstairs for a series of gigs. But it was a very odd experience being in the space.

Upstairs there were three enormous screens and one of them projected these videos that I had made for the music and the other two had these live feeds to the CCTV of downstairs. If you had headphones on you could hear music from the video and if you took them off you could just hear this rumbling bass coming through the floor of the band playing downstairs but it still took a while to put the things together. It took a while to understand what you were watching on the screens was related to the noise, it was quite an uncanny experience.

RR There has been very unusual feedback to the whole thing. People really seemed to get a lot from it, some sort of feeling that it really took them by surprise, they didn’t know exactly know what it was. It was a lot to do with the music and partly to do with what you were doing. Some of it was quite inseparable, dependent on what you were there to see. I felt like there were elements of what you were doing that were seeping into everything and that was a big part of the reason that they got something special from it. As well as the fact it was a combination of something – a group of people who had worked for years at different things and at different times but there was an incredible respect between everyone so it had a bit of a celebratory feel about it.

I definitely feel that the event was operating on lines that were more from the art world than the music world. Because that was done well, they got a slightly different feeling from the experience but didn’t necessarily know why. It was a real triumph without having to ram it down people’s throats.



"I mean it’s quite hard to keep going if absolutely no one gives a fuck"

TZ Also the way people discovered it seemed quite ambiguous. It didn’t necessarily feel like something that was being framed as art but also it wasn’t like a normal gig, it was a thing people stumbled across. There wasn’t a commercial gallery that was fronting it, it happened quite organically, between you and me. It was self-commissioned.

RR That’s why it was what it was. Because we have a pretty deep understanding of each other, of the work and beyond the work.

The attempt to do something like this in a more contrived way would normally produce contrived results you wouldn’t get the same feeling from it at all.

TZ There was a lot of serendipity as well; like the space was just extraordinary, it was such a fucking coup.

RR Well you described that space exactly, way before we saw it. Quite extraordinary. That was really something, incredible.

The starting point for it... I value your feedback even just on music and I’ve always played stuff to you and we listened to stuff we were recording in Dorset and you said there was something you had been working on visually that connected to the music and it wasn’t even what we were there to talk about, it had a completely natural evolution into what it became.

It’s like – bands that were and are really great, one of the reasons we respond to their music is because we are responding to the people who are making the music and their friendships and relationships. There was a communication between the people that really meant something, you are actually hearing people’s relationships, feelings being expressed and it is these feelings that you are actually connecting to.

That was always something with family music. You have people who grew up together singing so when you are listening to the Jackson Five or the Carpenters it means so much when you hear it.

TZ I think there’s an analogy between what you do and what I do, the digital and the analogue as well. I think this has been more obvious in music than it has in art. In music there has been a strong digital element since the ’70’s.

RR That grew and developed and evolved, possibly went as far as it could.

That now has led back to a kind of integration. So the things that feel the most important now are where there is integration between analogue and digital.

There was a moment when digital was new enough that it was exciting enough to just be there just doing that and just making music. When

"An informed bad review, rare as it is, is by far the most useful thing"

I started making rave music that’s all there was. There wasn’t any non-computer component, that’s all it was and that was all it needed to be. There wasn’t any consideration for anything else because that was the only way you made tunes. I feel like now it is really difficult to really be pushing things forward just using digital. Someone like Frank Ocean who is still pushing things, part of that is blending some quite traditional technologies with current ones.

TZ For me it’s definitely the case that digital tools are just another set of tools alongside all the other ones and I don’t want to throw the others out. Just because I’ve got a 3D printer it doesn’t mean I want to discard all the other things in this vocabulary.

But it’s funny how for me adopting Photoshop initially and then 3D modelling was a decision that came from a complete crisis. After I left art school I didn’t know how to make an artistic gesture. There was too much history and too many clichés

RR So did you not have a defined medium?

TZ I always made sculptures and paintings and sometimes installations. But I think... I suppose I thought of myself as someone who was originally turned on by painting but I had reached a point with painting, I just didn’t know how to do it anymore, it just felt loaded and so macho.

So I started using the computer as a way of totally stamping out that idea of an autographic or expressive gesture. I was making 3D models and digital images. And then trying to make them by hand stamping out all idiosyncrasies; I was trying to turn myself into a machine.

I think for me I adopted digital technologies as a way to try and filter something, to create a kind of breach between conception and execution.



But then what happened was gradually it became a foil, I was doing this incredibly laborious very mechanical work, taking these very schematic ways of making and eventually it became a foil, something to retaliate against and I found I was able to do these things that are much more hybrid and they go back and forth from digital to analogue.

Making sculptures in clay, then 3D printing them, then casting them and the paintings as well, they have digital fingerprints on them.

RR I want to have all the upside of these things, because it is difficult to make stuff that really feels progressive. It is hard and I feel like if you don’t have access to the full range of tools it just gets harder. People who are recording in a knowingly retro way are just shutting themselves off from things that will help them do more interesting things, but also if you are just recording with a laptop you are also missing out on a whole load of things. I can also see it is quite confusing to do it that way unless you have the experience and focus needed.

This again comes back to being a bit older. I wouldn’t have known how to put these things together when I was younger; it’s only now I can. I

am not going to use anything but a computer to capture and sequence all this stuff because I’ve got hundreds of hours of material. I wouldn’t have been able to make this without a computer. This couldn’t have existed just with tape, the analogue side of it from the drum machines to the mixing desk to the mics.

TZ And the performers...

RR Yes, and the performers.

I had a shock today as we were mastering this new E.P which has led on from the shows we did.

We had a vibe from the shows and we started recording again and we started some new things. One of the things we recorded of the show was Computer Love. We did a basic cover at the show of Computer Love by Zapp/Roger Troutman but we incorporated a bit of Computer Love by Kraftwerk. It’s a bit of an in joke; Computer Love and Computer

RICHARD RUSSEL & TOBY ZIEGLER

Love. It was quite fun and then we went to record it; we finished the recording and went to master it today.

When you are mastering an E.P or album you are closely AB'ing things together to try and ensure some sort of continuity to what you are listening to. In the studio you record one song at a time, but when you go to master you look as the whole album or E.P. as one thing. Obviously, things are going to be different but you want to make sure you put the whole thing on. You want to make sure it works on the same level; nothing jumps out (unless that is something you want).

But there was something about the recording of Computer Love I couldn't get to grips with sonically. And what it turned out to be, the recording of Computer Love was totally analogue; there was no digital element to it.

TZ Are you going to go back to it? Introduce something?

RR No I think the only digital element is the title (Laughter)

TZ A good artist makes really shit work.

RR A good artist can make mistakes.

TZ And I think it's really important to make those mistakes in public.

RR Why?

TZ For me it's only through people seeing and responding to my work that I know what I've done. I really don't know until a lot later. Also, the most useful reviews I have ever had have been bad ones.

RR An informed bad review, rare as it is, is by far the most useful thing.

A good review is not that useful and most bad reviews are not that useful and sometimes are annoying. But an informed bad review, I had one of those once and it was extremely...

TZ Just the one. (Laughter)

RR Yeah, well maybe two that I can think of, where people have understood the work and they have pointed out something about the work I hadn't seen.

Because if I had seen it I might have done it differently and that is really useful, but it is rare.

RR I made a record with XXXXXX and there was one reviewer, who said -

it got great review by the way - but there was one reviewer who said "This guy is really interesting, the guy producing it is really interesting, the vocal is interesting, and the music is really interesting but not all the music loves the vocals". That was a bit of a turning point for me. I remember in the making of the record with XXXX he was really open to new sounding things and was always pushing for more synth and more digital and he was always pushing that. He loved it, but I don't think it always loved him.

So it is not enough to say - to be a really great collaborator - to say "Oh they loved it, let's do some more of that". You actually have to be a bit more thoughtful about the connection between sounds and the people. For people to be excited by something is not enough if you have a feeling. Because I had a feeling at the time, that's why it was a great bit of criticism. They had seen something I had felt but I hadn't pushed it.

What bad reviews have you had that have been useful?

TZ There was one really early on. It helped me realise that all of the process and thought that I was putting into the work wasn't necessarily obvious and when you walked in cold it was something quite different, quite slick. There was a lot that was invisible and while I didn't want it to look laboured, I didn't want it to look cold or slick. But you just come to realise that what you think you are making and what someone is receiving can be so different.

Something that I thought of as conceptual was being received as graphic, so it made me rethink.

I made a video for the show based on one of the tunes and you totally remixed/remade it. Someone is coming on Friday to help see if the video can still work for this totally new tune.

I've got to say I've got some reservations about this. I think it might work. I think the shows have informed what you are doing now. There's a real atmosphere that the shows had that has obviously informed what you are doing now. And the way that I made that video was very much responding to something that was pretty digital, it had a massive 808 in it. And it might make it more interesting because what I made was a completely CGI video with little blips of live footage dropped into it. But essentially it was these 3D animations of landscapes that I'd been making over the last 45 years that I used in paintings.

I also dropped in all these 3D models of my sculptures. It was kind of 'looting the archive' to create a walk through, and now I think it might be interesting to juxtapose with something that very analogue. It remains to be seen, so that's what we're doing on Friday.

#EVERYTHINGISRECORDED

EVERYTHING IS RECORDED, 2018 HACKNEY ARTS CENTRE, SAVOY CINEMA, LONDON



RON ARAD AND MOURAD MAZOUZ AT MO DINER DECEMBER 2019
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