

BERLINER - Moshkovitz

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Boris Moshkovitz interviewing Jeremy Blake
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1. In which creative fields have you worked in your career thus far?

I have always been an artist. I have been drawing non-stop since the age of 2. (I have posed as a designer from time to time, in order to pay the bills, but I have no design degree.) I have experimented a lot with computer in an effort to come with painterly, time based artworks that feel new. (This was my only requirement: I wanted to feel like I hadn't seen the artwork before, no matter how nostalgic the emotion behind it.) Making this kind of artwork has led me to some fantastic collaborations recently, including doing some 'moving paintings' for PT Anderson's new film 'Punchdrunk Love', and a series of 4 record covers for Beck's upcoming release. I have a show of paintings and DVDs coming up this fall at MCA San Diego, which is very exciting for me. It's the first painting I've done in 7 years. I'm all over the place right now, in a good way.

2. In which way does your creative process change, working in these different creative disciplines (design, music, and film)? And how is your artistic work (drawing, painting, digital painting, video) influenced by these approaches?

Creativity is really just problem solving. As a fine artist, the problem is that one feels that something must be expressed-usually visually. I'm open to ideas from all mediums, and all sources that might help me in this process. When I started making the DVDs I'm best known for, I wanted an artwork that would be equal parts painting and time-based. To give my painting a jolt of life-even if it risked creating a Frankenstein. Richard Prince once said that Frankenstein was a handsome guy. I think so too.

3. Is your work also influenced by growing up with computer games? Have you incorporated the early and/or contemporary game aesthetic into your work?

I played hours of arcade games when I was a kid, and I remember the arcade environment as kind of sleazy and sexy (which is why I never shared the bias that older people do about computers being for nerds). There was an arcade at the beach near where I grew up, and I used to be thrilled to be there with the older kids. When I was 9 or 10, teenagers always seemed so sexually charged and larger than life. I remember that fondly, and also the bad music of that period, like Foreigner and Journey, which was very treble intensive and produced especially for the then current throngs of casual cocaine users. I remember the flatness of early games like Asteroids, which allowed for an asteroid to wander off of one side of the screen and re-enter from the opposite side. This ensured that there would be a limited number of asteroids, but it also implied that the flat view provided was just a small section of a much larger warped space. This kind of loaded flatness probably did influence me, but I never think about it directly when I'm making work. I still listen to some of the songs from The Who's 'Tommy' in the studio, which are about a deaf, dumb and blind pinball wizard-so I guess that's as close as I get to being directly influenced by games.

4. Rolf Fehlbaum, chairman of Vitra design, said: "The worst realm is the one that lies between design and art, where the objects which satisfy neither artistic nor functional requirements take up residence." How do you feel about the danger to dilute the quality of your art work by crossing the border into the commercial field?

This sounds like a warning to junior designers to remember that they're not artists, and therefore to avoid cultivating the stereotypical ego of one, lest they end up roaming like phantoms through that horrible sounding 'worst realm'. I can imagine an even worse hell though, which would involve having to labor away while some pundit stood over my shoulder getting paid six times as much just to make seemingly wise pronouncements. I think young fine-artists, if not young designers, should try to cultivate a healthy ego. If they don't, then they're in for a very rough ride. I perceive very little danger of diluting my work as an artist if and when I occasionally collaborate with talented people from other disciplines. Just the opposite is true. There is much more danger of being badly contextualized within the art world.

5. Your work has always been visually very appealing. Are beauty and style important elements of your work? Or are they just merely surface? What lies beneath?

What lies beneath beauty and style? Human psychology, which has a structural beauty as well.

6. Is art entertainment? Or can art be entertainment?

If art is enjoyable to anyone at all, then I suppose it's a form of entertainment.

However, I think that producing entertainment involves a very deliberate attempt to please a certain sized crowd, and I don't conceive of art-making, no matter how seductive the results, in quite the same way. In art-making you allow your fears and desires take shape, and then you hope people respond, but you usually don't take the same steps to gauge your audience. (For example, art doesn't have a self imposed rating system like American movies and records often do.) Exceptional people can synthesize the two pursuits and make it look easy. Paul Thomas Anderson and Beck, for example, are great artists who happen to make great entertainment. But the balance that they pull off, or people like Bjork or Lars Von Treer pull off is not easy to achieve.

7. What relevance do fine arts have for you in a world dictated by entertainment and information/media overflow?

Fine art is usually made by one person, (or sometimes a group which is working together by choice) who is responding to their own desires, and battling their own fears, in order to create a poetic object or event. The need to be this self involved can go easily awry, but when it is successful it's very generous and powerful-a manifestation of what Nietzsche refers to as a healthy selfishness. When information or entertainment, or art for that matter, is overwhelming or off-putting because we are being manipulated with it. Great art and great entertainment are not manipulative. They're open. Openly seductive or openly distant, but open.

8. You have worked on several projects in the entertainment industry. When you work on projects with musician Neil Landstrumm, or you collaborate with Boogie Nights director, P.T. Anderson on his movie "Punch-Drunk Love", do you aim for a specific experience? And if so, how would you describe this new experience?

I aim for great results in general. That involves staying open to new possibilities for the work right up until the deadline, when it comes time to 'shoot the engineers' as Buckminster Fuller once put it. Somebody like Paul, who loves his art more than anything, could probably mix a movie 10 different ways and every version would be great. A deadline keeps him focused on one final edit, me on one final artwork, and Neil on one final record, so I suppose a deadline which is firm but not cruel is kind of a saving grace for any solo or group effort-and something that I always aim for.

9. Has the progress in the available software influenced your work?

The faster the machines get, the happier I am. Painting is nice when it goes slowly, but machines should hustle. (Is there a German translation for 'hustle'?)

10. How do you think the Internet and all the technology that surrounds will influence your work in the future? How do you feel your work has changed, and where are you heading?

At the moment I'm not so interested in interactivity in fine art. As an artist I think of technology the way a musician thinks about an electric instrument. If its right for the work I want to make I'll use it, and if not I'll use an older technique. For example, I am painting again because I like the way painting seems to 'stop time'. This is the same thing that used to frustrate me about it 7 years ago, but since then I have had the techniques made available to me to make a painting (at least in sensibility) which travels through time and space on DVD, so now its starting to be fun for me to stop once in a while and focus on a still image.

11. What kind of projects are you envisioning, when you dare to think utopian?

I have a sweet note from the painter Laura Owens with a smiley face on it that say's "Jeremy: Painting is nice and it will soon save the world!" So when I think of utopic art I tend to think of that note. Someday I intend to get all the edges right on a series of paintings, and showing them with a series of gorgeous DVDs or beautifully edited looping films. This will almost certainly save the world. And maybe reading a series of my somewhat sardonic scripted drawings, or listening to Beck's new record, will help ease the pain if it seems that the world can't be saved...

12. How do you adapt in regards to the constant change in society, business and culture?

Raymond Chandler has a book called "Trouble is My Business". I have always liked the simultaneously dire and affirmative quality of that title. Constant change is my business.