

RESPECTFULLY YOURS

Just before the opening of his new solo exhibition, we met Troy Henriksen in his studio. Extracts.

Tell me about your new show *Respectfully Yours*...

More than a homage, it's about respect for the paintings of the past. I've been playing with these artists throughout my career and thought of doing something more specific.

Why did you choose these specific paintings?

Because they are the ones I like, of course! These are the ones who came into my life. And they can do so in many different ways. For instance, you may send me a postcard of a painting and it means something to me... Or I might read something in the newspapers.

Also, I always liked Velasquez, he is one of the greatest painters. As a self-taught artist I was very surprised to understand the history of the birth of Venus, being the goddess of beauty. I understood that beauty was the beginning of all knowledge. Without beauty there is no reason to go on.

Is art a message, a medium, all of it?

It can be a message, of course is a medium. It can be a channel, it's a unifier. There are people who are specifically tuned into the things of reality, they have a fine tuning to a certain understanding of their place in the world, and they go out in the world and deal with one another and they ask the fundamental questions of life: *why are we here, how do we relate, how do we fit in*, all that stuff... Language sometimes is not enough for this kind of people, they need another way to communicate these complex questions, then we transmit this and we entertain.

You use words in your work, sometimes as messages and also as color...

Sometimes I use words as a color, sometimes it's just an impulse because I work from intuition. I work with reasoning, I work with ideas. I deal with a literal pictorial mind that deals in language and picture. So I'm sharing with you what's going on in my mind and how I relate to the world.

I know how important music is to you, how do you combine the two arts?

Every painting (or almost) is related to a song. For instance, *Raw Picasso* is for Iggy Pop. I related that painting to Iggy Pop, because Picasso came to Montmartre in 1900 something as a young boy in the same way that Iggy Pop went to New York City when he was that age. They are both raw artists and they were both out to change art forever. Picasso was a beautiful punk for his age, he threw away his beret, he threw out the easel, I related to that. I'm in Montmartre where Picasso painted. Then there is *Ring of Fire*, by Johnny Cash, the Venus is *Who Do You Love?* by Bo Diddley, Rembrandt is one of my personal songs.

Do you play often?

Every day I play and paint. I wrote a new song for this exhibition called *Starving Artist*. A song about [having] "no money no food". I'm a conceptual artist who decided to be a painter in Montmartre. I love the romantic idea of art and I love this kind of painters and I love the spirit of that still existing in Montmartre. I'm a promoter of beauty and it's as simple as that.

What do you do best?

Showing my love.

Best quality?

I don't know.

Your main flaw?

Disorganization! Look around you in here, I have scraps of paper I've been carrying for twenty years. They are on the floor and they will go with me to the next place, still on the

floor! I need to hold on to my thoughts, feelings and... *stuff* - as I might need to use them later. It's like a computer up here in my head: I'm Google, and Photoshop, and iTunes and a dictionary and a filing cabinet...

Let's talk some more about the exhibition

It is a sort of demonstration, for me and the people around me, of saying: "look at all the beautiful art that is in the museums". I've always gone to museums to learn. I didn't go to a school, I don't know what the academic world thinks of me, but the thing is: hey, there is more than Andy Warhol out there! It's as if Pop Art just took over. I'm a painter who plays around with everything, and lot of my paintings relate to music and I have this great opportunity to be an American in Paris, *an American singing country-western songs, painting Matisse*. I mean, this is unique for me!

You managed to replace *L'Origine du monde* with your own painting at Musée d'Orsay: how did you do it?

My friend Holden suggested doing a project. He had a camera and I had an idea. I said "let's go to the museum: I'll introduce my paintings to other paintings to see what they look like, and you can be the photographer". So we did!

We were thrown out of Musée d'Orsay twice because they did not know the painting of my portrait, they did not know if it belonged to the museum or if it was mine. I said "this is my painting, I did it! Can't I have my painting in here?" They didn't know what to say... They were more upset that we were having fun, I think, than actually the question of the painting. The *Origine du Monde* was a *cadeau*. Gustave Courbet made it happen that I was able to put my painting in place of his...

You've always liked Courbet

He is an amazing artist! They did not know what to do with him... Shoot him or else... He said he belonged to no church, no religion, no government, no school. He belonged to himself and nature. This is a great motto.

Do you receive letters, messages, that touch you?

Yes. Two survivors of Auschwitz bought some of my paintings, and said they resembled a new day for them. You can't imagine how this moved me. And then there are the young kids, and their reactions to my work.

So, who do you paint for?

As an artist, your audience may not even be born yet! You know, we may be making art for a generation that's going to survive a nuclear war, and come out of a bunker and maybe they'll find a nice painting to put on their wall. That is the power of painting.

Paris, February 28, 2011