

# THE ART LIFE

On Creativity and Career

STUART HORODNER







**Fahamu Pecou**  
*Rock...Well (Radiant Pop Champ)*  
 2010

## 2. INFLUENCE

Books, artworks, places, and people that we know (or know about) influence our ideas and activities. They inform us about what is possible or permissible, and provide role models to test ourselves against. When asked about his affinity to Picasso's painterly style in the late 1930s, Arshile Gorky replied, "If he drips, I drip."<sup>1</sup> When Fahamu Pecou set out to portray himself in *Rock...Well (Radiant Pop Champ)* (2010), an interpretation of Norman Rockwell's famous 1960 *Triple Self-Portrait* for the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*, he depicts a cigar smoking realist watched over by his personal wise men—Muhammad Ali, Andy Warhol, and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

As freshman art students at The Cooper Union, Hans Haacke made us buy Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, as required reading for his sculpture class. I was unaware of the possibilities beyond traditional forms and sanctioned art spaces, and this reference book jump-started my interest in site specificity, durational performance, archives, and ephemera. It introduced me to Eleanor Antin, Mel Bochner, Douglas Huebler, On Kawara, Richard Long, Joseph Beuys, and many others. I must credit Lippard's presentation of fragments of text, artworks, documents, and interviews with providing me an inclusive overview of the conceptual practices that were taking place in the years after my birth and before my bar mitzvah.

I've always been drawn to the example of multi-taskers, perhaps because they have given me the confidence to pursue different creative outlets at the same time. I'm encouraged by artists who write, musicians who draw or paint, film directors who act, and so on. Maybe it's because I have not always known what I wanted to do until I found myself doing it.

Frank O'Hara was a poet, critic, and curator at The Museum of Modern Art. His work expresses the belief that a profound engagement with art and literature, and the cultivation of love and friendship, is evidence of a life fully lived. I wholeheartedly agree. This section of his poem "Having a Coke With You" (1966) is a fine example:

I look  
at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the world  
except possibly for the *Polish Rider* occasionally and anyway it's in the Frick  
which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together the first time  
and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of Futurism  
just as at home I never think of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* or  
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used to wow me  
and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them  
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the sun sank  
or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as carefully  
as the horse  
it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience  
which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I'm telling you about it <sup>2</sup>

Alice Neel's portraits of family members, neighbors, businessmen, and the creative community combine a coloring book certainty and a hint of caricature. I cherish any opportunity to see them. In her nude self-portrait at age eighty, she turned her observational acumen and curiosity on herself, depicting a piercing gaze, cascading flesh, and kinetic right foot. This no-nonsense painting has always reminded me to embrace audacity and candor.

Leon Golub was my mentor. He was a painter, educator, and agitator who was constantly tilting at windmills in the form of powerful political figures and the agencies that were responsible for war, torture, and corruption. Golub saw art-making as a heroic and idealistic enterprise fraught with contradictions and hurdles. He was more than capable of dealing with these while keeping a healthy sense of humor.

#### **Brad Cloepfil Interview with Stuart Horodner**

**SH:** How has life in Oregon affected your work?

**BC:** Two things. If you want to look for architecture that was evocative and powerful here in the Pacific Northwest, you didn't look at buildings. You looked elsewhere, at the dam system on the Columbia River, at the silos in eastern

Oregon built out of laminated 2 x 10s. Some of the old log flumes that go for miles still exist. There are other forms of architecture that are more interesting constructions and more bold. That's empowering and liberating because you don't have to worry about it being judged by your faculty, or the architectural community or your own sense of propriety. You can just go be moved, surprised and emboldened by these things that were not done intentionally per se. In a way, it was like the old days with Charles Moore looking at vernacular architecture. This is looking at civil engineering, 10 miles of snow fence and starting to understand that kind of power, that certain built acts can really move you. It gets into the sublime. It's real, they're not intellectual ideas, it's like landscape. You go out on the Columbia River Gorge, or the Wallowa Canyon or Hell's Canyon and you are awed and moved by the purity of form and space.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Jørgen Leth**

For me, poetry has a strong link to my filmmaking. My films learn from my poetry. In poetry, you're free. You start in the corner and you don't know where it leads you. I have no message, I have nothing I want to tell, I just start and see where it leads, and it's a big surprise and relief if it's good. That's the ideal state for filmmaking. I like the idea of chance coming into filmmaking, in shooting, in editing, and I do make space in my rules of game for chance. William Burroughs, Andy Warhol and John Cage are major influences for my work. Godard is the only cineastic influence.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Morton Feldman**

I'll tell you how I got my opening. I got it from Kafka. I read an article once on Kafka, and I was very fond of Kafka. You'll notice Kafka's first sentences: "Someone has been telling lies about Joseph K." You know that's Kafka, you are in the world of Kafka. We were all reading Kafka in New York at about twenty, twenty-one, fantastic thing. I took that idea and I put it into my own music. Kafka definitely influenced my feeling of how to begin a piece. Immediately in the atmosphere.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Karyn Olivier**

I often think of Tony Hepburn who was my ceramics professor at grad school. I vividly remember the day he came into my studio and said, "Everything in here is dead; there's no life in these objects. Stop using clay for the next month." It was a startling command—scary, really. My only true experience with art-making at that time was through clay. It took me a few days to realize that he wanted me to focus on the ideas—not to worry myself with questions like, "How can I make this out of clay knowing the material's limitations?" It cannily forced me to see that it was possible to develop an idea for a work without first and foremost



thinking about how it might be achieved through the use of clay—maybe another material would actually make more sense, conceptually, to use. The idea, material and process work in concert with each other, of course, but it's ok to focus on just the conceptual framework initially, too. I now teach (in a sculpture department), but each semester I find myself quoting Tony for the benefit of the students as much as for myself—"the quality of the questions you ask yourself is in direct correlation to the quality and sophistication of the work produced." It resonates today with the same intensity it did twelve years ago.<sup>6</sup>

### **Tony Tasset**

When I was a kid I always drew and I had books on Norman Rockwell, Walt Disney and the fantasy illustrator Frank Frazetta. Then I went to art school and of course rejected all those kitschy works. Recently I've realized those guys really influenced me because even if their message was pabulum, pro-American propaganda, and soft-core teenage fantasy, they did have a great power to communicate. I am probably more influenced by pop-culture these days than art. I want to make art like a Philip Roth novel or a Bob Dylan album.

I do not want to individuate my own touch, instead I want to honor the everyday and connect myself to other people, not separate myself. I see pumpkin carving, and snowman making as populist traditions of figurative sculpture making—contemporary ephemeral totem. And although their images are often used to sell things, the vernacular traditions themselves are not capitalist driven. I want to take something as common as a snowman and see if I can charge it with the emotional complexity of a Giacometti or a Rodin. When I made my first sad snowman I built a real sad snowman in my front yard as a model to look at. We had had one of those big Chicago snows and there were snowmen up and down the street, but only mine had a sad frown. After only one night my snowman had been knocked down while all the other smiling snowmen on the street were still intact. I theorized that there was something sacrilegious or unpatriotic about my Prozac deprived Frosty. When my snowman got knocked down I knew I was on to something.<sup>7</sup>

### **Mike Kelley**

The most frightening media things I can remember from my childhood was a puppet show on a children's TV program about a puppet in one of these little prosceniums who was supposed to be on an endless stairway and falls off into nothingness. You just hear the voice: "Ooooooooo..." For years that has been my ideal. If I could make something that moving, that could have you frightened for the



**Tony Tasset**  
Neil Young  
1997



**Nicole Eisenman**  
*From Success to Obscurity*  
 2004

## 12. SUCCESS

How do you define success? Does it have something to do with freedom and time? Would it involve showing with this gallery and having your work bought by that collector and getting invited to all the right parties? Do you need to have a big studio with assistants and exhibitions lined up for the next two years, or would a residency at The MacDowell Colony or The Hambidge Center satisfy you? Do you hunger for full page color ads, or better yet, the cover of a glossy art magazine? Would a great review in *Art Papers* be validation enough or are you holding your breath until Roberta Smith shows up? How about a good teaching job and health insurance?

One goal of all artists, whether they work with clay or sound or film or food, is to create situations that are powerful enough to affect others. Robert Rauschenberg said, "If you do not change your mind about something when you confront a picture you have not seen before, you are either a stubborn fool or the painting is not very good."<sup>1</sup> All you can do is establish your own criteria for personal and professional achievement and meter your progress. John Chamberlain, known for his large-scale sculptures made with crushed automobile parts, has shown his work steadily since the mid-1950s, in important exhibitions and prestigious museums. Recently, he said, "I once had a drink with Billie Holiday, and I smoked a joint with Louis Armstrong. Those are my real claims to fame."<sup>2</sup>

My version of success is being able to do the work I'm most excited about and to make things happen that might not have been possible if I wasn't around. This might best be called the "It's a Wonderful Life" effect.<sup>3</sup> I am satisfied when I see the exhibitions that I've curated listed on artist's résumés, when the letters



of recommendation I've written result in residencies or jobs for people I believe in, and when boxes of catalogues come from the printer still smelling of ink. I'm excited when attendance is up and reviews are positive, and when I sense that my next projects will bring increased risks and resources, and greater rewards for all involved.

### Leon Golub

There are three things: your work, your livelihood, and your personal life. If any two are going well at the same time consider yourself lucky.<sup>4</sup>

### Lane Relyea

Success isn't just quantified in terms of how much a work sells for; it also is measured by how often an artist appears on the visiting-artist roster at art schools, or how often one is commissioned to do site-specific projects at Kunsthallen and contemporary art spaces. Perhaps this relates to why artists themselves draw more attention now than their work; their celebrity has a value of its own, as does their functioning—are they articulate about their work, do they have connections, do they look glamorously arty?<sup>5</sup>

### Jean Dubuffet

I do not believe that I have ever encountered a painting which gave me immediately such a strong sense of commotion as the one by Ivan Albright portraying a door; I found it at the Art Institute during my brief stay in Chicago in 1951. It is an unforgettable painting, and it seems to me, a striking example of a work that is worth going to the ends of the earth to see.<sup>6</sup>

### Jan Tumlir Interview with Michael Markowsky

**MM:** Based on your observations, what makes an artist successful? What gives them their first start, what gives them their longevity?

**JT:** I've always thought that when you have someone in a class and they have a breakthrough, it's always when they get very specific, when they decide that their work is not just about architecture, but about mid-century architecture, and moreover it's about the way that mid-century architecture functions in contemporary advertising, let's say. It's about defining something very specific. Projects that seem to never go anywhere are ones that are maintained in this condition of generalized and totally open-ended possibility. There is a great fear on the part of a lot of young artists to peg themselves to anything.



Karyn Olivier  
*Making Handball*  
2009

On the one hand, it's almost arbitrary what you start with, but since you've already demonstrated some sort of inclination toward it, then to define it further, to become more specific with it, this will only lead you toward what is interesting about it for you. You have to assume, as an artist or writer, that a large part of your experience is unknown to you. You discover it, you discover what you are interested in, you discover what was always there, what your propensities are. I don't think it's necessarily intuitive. The first decision can be almost arbitrary, but by actually working it through in all its specifics, you begin to get closer, I think, to what it is that you are "really" interested in.<sup>7</sup>

### Karyn Olivier

I want to be surprised, stunned by art's capabilities. I want to feel ecstatic and comforted by what my works can offer to the world; scared and uncertain whether or not my art will succeed. I think success is developing an ego big enough to grant myself the unsolicited right to make work "for" the public, while remaining humble enough to know that often, it may not be what they asked for. Success for me involves watching and admiring the things of this world—accepting the invitation (or charge, perhaps) to act—to add or shift something I observe, bust it wide open and trust what's revealed will be worthwhile.<sup>8</sup>

### Maurizio Cattelan

It's difficult, as an artist, to admit you want to be famous. Being an artist has nothing to do with fame, it has to do with art, that intangible thing needing integrity. Nevertheless, I think one has to confess a desire to be famous, otherwise one is not an artist. Art and fame are the expression of a desire to live forever, two things which are strictly interlinked.<sup>9</sup>

### Dave Eggers

First, I was a sellout because *Might* magazine took ads. Then I was a sellout because our pages were color, and not stapled together at the Kinko's. Then I was a sellout because I went to work for *Esquire*. Now I'm a sellout because my book has sold many copies. And because I have done many interviews. And because I have let people take my picture. And because my goddamn picture has been in just about every fucking magazine and newspaper printed in America.

And now, as far as *McSweeney's* is concerned, *The Advocate* interviewer wants to know if we're losing also our edge, if the magazine is selling out, hitting the mainstream, if we're still committed to publishing unknowns, and pieces killed by other magazines.

And the fact is, I don't give a fuck. When we did the last issue, this was my thought process: I saw a box. So I decided we'd do a box. We were given stories by some of our favorite writers—George Saunders, Rick Moody (who is uncool, uncool!), Haruki Murakami, Lydia Davis, others—and so we published them. Did I wonder if people would think we were selling out, that we were not fulfilling the mission they had assumed we had committed ourselves to?

No. I did not. Nor will I ever. We just don't care. We care about doing what we want to do creatively. We want to be interested in it. We want it to challenge us. We want it to be difficult. We want to reinvent the stupid thing every time. Would I ever think, before I did something, of how those with sellout monitors would respond to this or that move? I would not. The second I sense a thought like that trickling into my brain, I will put my head under the tires of a bus.

The thing is, I really like saying yes. I like new things, projects, plans, getting people together and doing something, trying something, even when it's corny or stupid. I am not good at saying no. And I do not get along with people who say no. When you die, and it really could be this afternoon, under the same bus wheels I'll stick my head if need be, you will not be happy about having said no. You will be kicking your ass about all the no's you've said. No to that opportunity, or no to that trip to Nova Scotia or no to that night out, or no to that project or no to that person who wants to be naked with you but you worry about what your friends will say.<sup>10</sup>

### Keith Haring

I would like to do a book one day with photos of me all over the world with different children. Many pictures like this exist from every place I have visited. I always have had contact with children on some level during every exhibition in every country.

This is one of the things that I am thinking when I say there are aspects of my life and art that are not duplicated by any other artist that I know of.

I have letters from children from all over the world that testify to this connection. I don't know if it's my funny face or my simple nature that provokes laughter and sympathy between me and them. But we share something that to me is very important to understand the reason for living and meaning of "life," if there is any "meaning" to life at all.<sup>11</sup>



**Stuart Horodner** is Artistic Director of the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. He has held positions as visual arts curator at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, OR (2001–2004); director of the Bucknell University Art Gallery, Lewisburg, PA (1998–2001); and was co-owner of the Horodner Romley Gallery, New York, NY (1992–1996). He founded and co-directed the Affair at the Jupiter Hotel, an annual art fair in Portland (2004–2007). Horodner has contributed to journals and magazines including *Art Issues*, *Art Lies*, *Art on Paper*, *Bomb*, *Dazed & Confused*, *Sculpture*, and *Surface*. He has served in an advisory capacity to organizations including Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue, Creative Capital, Hallie Ford Family Foundation, and The MacDowell Colony. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union, New York, NY, and his MFA from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

***The Art Life: On Creativity and Career*** is a collection of solicited and selected texts that address the philosophical and practical issues that affect art-making and the marketplace. It brings together visual artists, curators, dealers, writers, musicians, architects, actors, and educators, who speak to their internal motivations, influences and processes, and to their external engagements with community, audience, career and success. Many of the contributors have taken part in exhibitions and public programs at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center from 2007 to 2011, and others have been included to represent provocative historical and contemporary viewpoints by a range of influential figures. The texts are joined by images of artists in the midst of creating or installing, as well as completed art works.

A life in the arts can be simultaneously rewarding, frustrating, doubt-filled, joyful and uncertain. And yet, thousands of artists persist every day, motivated by a private insistency and the promise of satisfaction and recognition. Each is attempting to combine their creative life with a thriving career, and this publication provides various "words of wisdom" which can serve to inspire, challenge, and reassure them. *The Art Life* posits that each creative individual must find the necessary information and materials to best establish their unique voice. The book is as much found as written, a heady mix of opinions and questions that can be used in classrooms and studios by artists of all ages.

Contributors include Bill Albertini, Nubar Alexanian, Regine Basha, bldgs, Daniel Bozhkov, Matt Bryans, Luis Camnitzer, Brad Cloepfil, Jennifer Coates, David Diao, Craig Drennen, Daniel Duford, Nicole Eisenman, Harrell Fletcher, Matthew Higgs, Mike Howard, David Humphrey, Jennie C. Jones, Nina Katchadourian, Wayne Koestenbaum, Anya Liftig, Judy Linn, François Morelli, Michael David Murphy, Eileen Myles, Karyn Olivier, Fahamu Pecou, William Pope.L, Padgett Powell, Nancy Princenthal, Paul Ramirez Jonas, Shana Robbins, Michael Rooks, Amanda Ross-Ho, Tad Savinar, Stephen Schofield, Mira Schor, Paul Shambroom, Harry Shearer, Lisa Sigal, Susan Silton, Joe Sola, Tony Tasset, Nato Thompson, Jack Whitten.

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