

Q – Mexico: To make it clear how the exhibition came about, we emailed you to ask if you would be interested in showing work, or creating a project for Mexico. You responded with proposing ‘May it keep the wolves in the hills and the women in our beds’ with the subtitle of ‘A collision of interests selected by Ryan Gander’. You’ve worked with a lot of young artists and selected artists for several group shows in the past, what were the decisions choosing these particular artists to show at Mexico?

A – Ryan Gander: I always think it’s a bit pretentious for artists to do ‘serious’ curating (as it is to include oneself in a self curated show), after all curating is a big job right? It’s not something one should really ‘dabble’ in. When I was a student I saw a show ‘curated’ by Jake and Dinos at a place called the Independent Art Space in Chelsea, I think. The show was entitled ‘Some of my friends are genius’s’. It was a simple gesture, the selection was their friends who made art that they liked. I think about that often when I by chance visit ‘curated’ shows with heavy thematics or with a strong presence of a curators interests or concerns. “Hey whose fuckin work’s this! Back off! If you want to be an artist go and make your own work”. It also brings to mind a question I often ask myself in those situations, “What’s better a curated show of bad work or a show with no intention of really great stuff?”

There’s a lot of young artists who don’t know W or hang out with X, didn’t go to study at Y or in fact live in Z. Their work is supreme and although by not being associated with W, X, Y and Z they are at a disadvantage in terms of possible exhibiting opportunities, their distance from W, X, Y or Z often means that they’re conscientious people who make work for good reasons, as opposed to letting their ambition to ‘be’ an artist rule there motivation.

Q – Is this show context specific to our invitation or was the show something you had formulated prior to us approaching you? The term ‘collision’ is something we have ended up talking about a lot as a group. Mainly we have just contradicted ourselves about how this event may or may or may not have an intention or whether this was important or not, and I guess if there is any need to speculate what the outcome of the event might be. Could you possibly elaborate a little on what you see as the significance of a ‘collision’ within this show?

A – Collisions, in the world of art and further afield in the ‘real’ world are immensely important, to me at least. Friction, foreignness, happenstance, difference, diversity, disorder and contradiction all fuel new meaning. Without those factors we are... Swiss. On time, colour coordinated, parked perfectly in the box with a collective taste. The world is beautiful not because of the way things compliment each other, but precisely because they don’t... they jar, and that jarring produces new noises.

Ok. There’s certainly some sort of collision going on here, the outcome is intriguing. However, not to dwell too much on the idea of a curator and their role in relation to exhibition making, but from your experience with regards to your own practice, have you found that the galleries and the curators you have worked with having a separate agenda to that of yours?

Some have agendas, some merely have an initial interest, faith, trust and conversation. That’s more fruitful I think, at least for me, because then you get to a place you’ve never been and you don’t expect. It’s like the difference between a conversation and a questionnaire. Conversations and shows with no agenda take you to a new place that maybe you didn’t even know existed. Lists of questions, thematics and rules take you on a route back to the beginning. It’s like looking for something that has already found you.

Q – It’s interesting that a lot of the work has been made for the show with the title in mind, which is quite loaded. Do you see yourself as a provocateur, are any of your own concerns in the show, or is it just an excuse to put good work together?

A – The title of the show is meant to be a sort of tongue in cheek spell against the superstition I have that this amazing creative life will one day come to a terrible end and I will go back to Allied Carpets. One of the biggest joys of being in the fortunate position of being an artist (as a job) is that the more you put in the more you get out. You can do anything, every day when you wake up you can decide from scratch what you want to do. Art is the science of freedom (Beuys). Last month I finished writing a book of social anthropology, this afternoon I designed a carpet for a gallery in China and after I put my daughter to bed I will try to invent a cocktail with my wife in the kitchen. Creativity is knitted into the fabric of life, so being an artist is just about being busy and enjoying yourself. Being able to merge art and life seamlessly is a total gift, a blessing. I hope the artists in the show are blessed with it too.

Q – Where did you first see the artists’ work? And do you see any similarities between your practice and the artists in the show?

A – John - I first saw a photo on the desktop of his laptop he had as a screensaver  
Lucia - I saw her work through a window of a show in a shop in Hoxton  
Rob - When I taught in Sheffield years ago  
Jacs - About 20 years ago when we made art together in 6th form

The only similarities I can see is that they are all conscious that they need to find their own language, not just make stuff that looks like art. And that if you end up making decisions continuously based around the same subject matter or materials / process what you are doing in fact stops being art, and falls into the realm of craft.

Q – You often work with designers and practitioners from other disciplines, how instrumental in this in what you produce and why does your output often involve this crossover?

A – I am open to exchange, I am in this to learn and have fun and grow and experience things I can’t yet image, a good strategy in learning is to surround yourself, or put yourself into situations where exchange with a diversity of perspectives is possible, which is one of the reasons I sometimes attend swingers parties.

Q – Have you got any shows of a similar nature lined up or in the planning?

A – No, this is the last thing I am ‘curating’, not because of anything associated with Mexico, just because I can’t see myself making new meaning this way. Maybe I will. I change my mind a lot, but I probably won’t. But I may.

Q – What’s the best show you’ve seen in the last twelve months?

A – dOCUMENTA (13) no question. Finishes next week I think. The worst is certainly the Damien Hirst show at Tate Modern, he’s up there with Banksy and Bob Marley posters, I find looking at his work almost as embarrassing as watching Blind Date.

Q – If you could give any advice to a young artist what would it be?

A – If you feel you have been hard at it for more than ten years and you feel like you’re not getting what you want from it, then stop.

Be open to advice from everyone, especially those who have no visual training.

Don’t be scared to change your work.

When you see work you like work out why it is better than your own.

Make work because you want to, not because you feel you have to.

Understand that those who worry about copyright are the ones who have a famine of ideas.

Make lots of work and throw lots away. The bad ones are the ones you learn from not the good ones.

Think of art as a group effort, a group contribution to the history of art.

The less it looks like art the better.

If languages other than the visual can annotate an idea better then use them.

Incorporate art into life, the way you dress, the food you cook....

Live in New York City once, but leave before it makes you hard; live in Northern California once, but leave before it makes you soft. Travel.

Accept certain inalienable truths, prices will rise, politicians will philander, you too will get old, and when you do you’ll fantasize that when you were young prices were reasonable, politicians were noble and children respected their elders.

Respect your elders.

Don’t expect anyone else to support you.

Maybe you have a trust fund, maybe you have a wealthy spouse; but you never know when either one might run out.

Don’t mess too much with your hair, or by the time you’re 40, it will look 85.

Be careful whose advice you buy, but, be patient with those who supply it.

Advice is a form of nostalgia, dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it’s worth.

But trust me on the sunscreen...

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MAY IT KEEP THE WOLVES IN THE HILLS AND THE WOMEN IN OUR BEDS.  
A collision of interests selected by Ryan Gander.

Jacqueline Bebb, Rob Lye, John Newton and Lucia Quevedo

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