



RYAN MCGINNESS

PORTRAIT by SHEPARD FAIREY

INTERVIEW: Adam Glickman

+ Do you feel that this group of artists constitutes an art movement, and if so, do you think you're part of it?

RM: Whether or not it's officially a movement, historically a movement, it can't yet be defined. Secondly, a lot of movements are self-defined, and I guess that's one of the reasons you're doing this story, because a lot of these artists aren't really hanging out as a group. We're not frequenting the same café and reading our poetry or whatever. No one's writing a manifesto and passing it around and we're all signing it or something like that. [But it is a movement] with everything that's going on, the similarities and parallels between people's work. Everything leans more towards a scene of sorts. Which raises an interesting issue, because have there been art scenes in the past? I don't know. Art trends, probably. Maybe it falls into that category as well. I think a movement is something more structured, and this isn't that structured.

+ What would you say might be a thread that binds you all together?

RM: I would say it's an interest in speed. The speed with which we create and take in visual information. So that means a reduction in actual mark-making. We're not making really painterly things. Or even abstract things. We're making really graphic, easily-consumed visuals. And of course the roots of that are in graffiti, graphics, design. So I think that speed is a thread. And I think the generational thing – the 80s had a lot to do with what's going on and the 70s as well.

+ これらのアーティストはあるアート・ムーブメントを構成していると思いますか？もしそうなら、自分もその一員だと思いますか？

RM みんながそう思ってるとしても、まだ定義はできないよ。ムーブメントってのは勝手に定義されるものだけど、オレらだって実際に集団でたむろしてるわけじゃないし、だれかの軍団指針声明みたいなにみんながサインしてまわってたりとかはありえない。(でもこのムーブメントは)すべてが現在進行形で、みんなの作品に共通点がある。シーンって感じで面白いよね。だっていままでにアート・シーンなんてあった？あってもトレンドでしょ。これはその一部なのかも知れないけど。

+ これらのアーティストを繋いでいるものは何だと？

RM スピードへの関心かな。視覚的情報を創造したり受容したりするスピード。つまりオレらはひとつひとつ手作業で、なんてほとんどしないし、いわゆる画家っぽい作品や、抽象的なものでさえつからない。オレらはグラフィック、簡単に消費されるビジュアルをつくらせる。そしてそのルーツはもちろんグラフィティ、グラフィック、デザインにあるね。あとは世代的なものかな – 70sや80sはいまの状況に大きな影響を与えてるよ。

+ コマーシャル文化については？

RM これが3つめのポイントだと思うんだけど、オレたちは今、消費され得るものをつくることのできる立場にいて、押し付けられることなく独自の消費文化を築いてる。これまでのアーティストは「民衆のための芸術」やポップ・アートを主張したところで – 必ずしも大衆向けだったとはいえない。オレたちは生産品を、大量生産品をつくることにビビってないんだ。そして安価なもの、ね。

+ どうやって製品と芸術とを区別しますか？もしくは区別すらしてませんか？

RM これって本質とは無関係な、単に意味論的、語彙的、定義的な問題なんだ。だれかが勝手につくったものだから、なんかの役割を担ってたり、需要を満たしてるわけでもない...だから概念的には同じものかな。マーケティングって観点からはもちろん別物だけど、それは別問

+ What about commercial culture?

RM: I think that ties into the third thread, the fact that a lot of us are now in positions where we can make things that can be consumed. We create our own consumer culture instead of having it dictated to us. That seems to be particularly unique to our generation, as far as artists go. I think a lot of artists in the past – as much as they claimed to have wanted to be ‘art for the people’ or pop art – really weren’t all that popular or accessible. We’re not afraid to make products, mass products. And inexpensive products, too. Maybe that’s a result of coming out of a consumer culture.

+ How do you separate your products from your fine art?

Or do you even separate them?

RM: Maybe it’s just a question of semantics. Regardless of whether or not one supports the other, they’re all just things that were made because someone had to make them. I lean towards thinking of them, conceptually, as equal. Marketing-wise, of course they’re not equal, but that’s a different issue. But conceptually, you’re talking about things that wouldn’t be created otherwise, things created by an individual as an extension of that person, and as the result of the individual’s vision. Something that isn’t fulfilling a design brief and isn’t work for hire. So it’s all the same to me.

+ Whether it’s a one-off or a hundred-off?

RM: Yeah, I mean even when you talk numbers and limited-editions, the differences are defined by the marketing strategy, not by the artistic integrity issues.

+ That’s another thing that ties this group together, and it goes back to growing up in the 80s when we all grew up on marketing. This is a very media-savvy group of people.

RM: I think if it were the case that the limited-edition or the mass-product stuff supported the ‘fine art stuff,’ then you would find the agenda behind it all to be more evil than it actually is. But I think we are just as genuine in our pursuit of making something that’s mass-produced as we are in our making of something that’s one-of-a-kind. As opposed to some kind of marketing ploy.

+ How did you choose artistically to get to where you are now?

RM: I just think it’s a process of being comfortable with who I am and recognizing what I like and not trying to fake. Don’t set out to make art. Just set out to make whatever you need to make and later define it or have someone else define it or don’t even worry about the definition. I think I ran into a lot of problems with my work as recently as three years ago when I was trying to make stuff that looked like art. On the other hand, when you set out to make whatever you need to make without defining the work as ‘art,’ it’s difficult...When you’re ahead of the curve, making work that has not yet been defined as art, it’s a difficult position to be in.

+ How would you like your art to be defined for the next generation of kids that look at it? Once you have a full body of work?

RM: Honest, I guess. And hopefully that honest pursuit can serve as some kind of inspiration for someone. A lot of times when I give talks, the same question always kind of comes up, ‘How do you be an artist?’ I give the same answer each time. As goofy and as cliché as it sounds, it’s not about being or filling a shell. It’s more about being yourself and then having these definitions fall in your place. And this goes back to what I was saying before, that the most difficult position we find ourselves in is that our work, whether or not it’s considered art, hasn’t been defined as art yet. It’d be easy to make oil on canvas, cause that’s already been defined as art, that’s easy. I don’t know why anyone now would want to make what has already been defined as art. That’s not in the interest of pushing us culturally.

+ But you guys definitely all consider yourselves artists in the classic sense of the word.

RM: Sure. Absolutely. And the rest of the world doesn’t. At least a lot of old-fashion galleries don’t. And that’s fine, because they’re more concerned with history and what has been defined as art opposed to what will be defined as art.

+ You mentioned “keeping your work honest” a couple times. What would you consider “dishonest work?”

RM: Trying to make work that looks like art, something you’ve already seen. The best works are gonna result out of being in touch with and comfortable with who you are. And I had a hard time resolving that kind of graphic aesthetic and applying it to art, because it’s an aesthetic that has historically resided in a different industry and it’s still immediately read as coming from that industry. But it’s how I know to best communicate visually. So it’s honest for me.

+ If you had to stick a name to this group, what would you call it?

RM: A name is definitely something that defines a movement, and I’m not sure that, as a group, anyone is ever going to agree on the name. Who came up with ‘graffiti?’

+ It wasn’t the artists...

RM: Maybe that’s where you go, because internally no one is going to agree. And this goes back to the point about movements being defined from the outside, almost being defined after the fact. That’s probably what’s going to happen. But once you define it, you kill it. Because then it becomes part of history, it’s not organically growing.

+ So it can’t grow anymore once it’s been defined?

RM: Let’s not say that, but I think it stunts its growth a bit. Maybe another magazine will do another article. And then inevitably, books are going to be published. And as that process happens, I think the movement and the group narrows, as opposed to blossoming and growing.

+ How do you think the Japanese have affected this group?

RM: First of all, it’s a more visually sophisticated culture – I can only speculate that that’s because of the kanji language. There is an appreciation for visuals as a whole. They’ve helped to define it – there are magazines that have done articles, grouped certain artists together, put on exhibitions and events. It’s refreshing, because I certainly don’t claim to understand the art industry over in Japan, but the support and appreciation is just there in ways it’s not here. And that’s even true in Europe, to an extent. This group of artists’ work is least appreciated in the country where it is all created. I don’t know why. Perhaps it’s a combination of Japanese culture being extremely sophisticated, European culture understanding



a little more about art history, recognizing and taking more chances with art. America is just so far behind, maybe that's the reason. A lack of understanding spawns the most interesting work. If we lived in a more understanding culture, there might not be the need for all of us to work so aggressively. Maybe we're all just doing it because no one understands it.

+ What about your contemporaries in the fine art world?

RM: There are people younger than me who are making tons of money and getting in the bi-annuals and all that jazz, but they're making old-fashioned work, they're following old strategies. I understand that, but it's frustrating.

+ Damien Loeb is a great example.

RM: He's making art, part of great collections, but it's not important work. It's conceptually faulty work. One of his schticks is his [creation of 'new'] film stills. I think that's great and that's interesting, but that idea doesn't have to be communicated in oil on linen. That's the cop-out. Because oil on linen is art, and oil on linen sells. And it's a fine enough idea, but to take it one step further would be to keep it digital, keep the medium, keep the integrity. Or do something a little more interesting than revert to proven art-marketing formats. It's sort of sad to see that example in particular, and it's frustrating.

+ Chris Johanson and Margaret Kilgallen, two artists on this list, are in the Biennial this year.

RM: Deservedly so, I guess. So that's promising.

+ Do you think the art world is going to come around?

RM: As our generation gets older, our buyer's circle starts making more money, and it begins to grow. But the problem is that our collectors are our peers, for the most part. The [art world-based] collectors of someone like Damien's work understand oil on linen, and that's why his collector base is older and he can charge more. And that collector base isn't going to understand cut-out vinyl on skateboard decks. So that's part of the frustration.

+ It's interesting that you choose these mediums because they're affordable to your peers.

RM: The materials are affordable, but speaking for myself, I'm really interested in the material of signs. Which has to do with mass-produced things.

+ Some of the other artists in this issue are also influenced by outdoor signs. What's so attractive about them?

RM: I think it's the empowering aspect. Walking in some kind of public space, the signage has been anonymously created, and it's almost dictatorial. And you never realize that actually someone made this, someone made decisions about the materials, and the layout and the graphics. They're very authoritative. And now we're in a position where we can assume that that power and make our own signs. For me, that has something to do with it.

+ It all kind of ties into graffiti, because it's nameless. You never know who made this.

RM: It's very cold, very graphic, and because of that it's very authoritative. But now, I'm the authority. And it comes from the advertising world, which is also anonymous. Individuals don't make advertising, corporations make advertising. And to assume that and take that power back as an individual is exciting.

+ Tom Sachs is also tapping into the same imagery, but packaging it for the gallery world.

RM: He's not making work for his peers, he's making art for his parents' generation. Not necessarily visually or conceptually, but marketing-wise. He is hooked up in that old-world art system. That's fine, and more power to him, but it's not as interesting and important as some of the decisions that we've made.

+ Because it's too easy?

RM: It is very easy to limit your production and secure the value of your work by placing limits on it. And ultimately, this group of artists that is being talked about is interested in sharing. We're here in order to facilitate the flow of ideas. And if you're going to take the high-art road, you hold on and you make precious by withholding. And that's the path that he's taken. It's hard to come to terms with seeing that. Why would anyone want to be that way? Regardless of his work and how great it is.

+ So you think he's limiting his potential by just working in certain mediums that are sellable?

RM: Of course. He's not sharing his ideas, or sharing his existence. But that's not his idea in the first place anyway. That's a very shrewd marketing tactic.

題。でも概念的にはそんな区別なんか存在しないか、ある人自身の延長として、その人のビジョンの帰着として個別につくられるものなんだ。そんなの教科書に載ってるものじゃないし、雇われるための仕事でもない。だからオレにとっては全部同じ。

+ アートの見で、なんで今やってるようなことを始めましたか？

RM 快適に、自分が好きなものを認識して、フェイクにならないためのプロセスを経てきただけ。芸術ってどこから出発してはダメなんだ。ただ自分のつくりたいものをつくって、後で自分や他人が定義すればいい。もっといえば定義なんて全然意味ないんだ。... だけど自分のつくりたいものを芸術とは無関係につくるってほんと難しい。... 曲がり角にさしかかった時、芸術だと定義されてないものをつくるのは、とても大変なんだ。

+ 次の世代にあなたの作品をどう定義して欲しいですか？

RM 分かんないけど、... 誠実さ、かな。それだけ。そしてその誠実さへの追求がだれかのインスピレーションに役立ればいいな。使い古されてアホみたいに聞こえるけど、これは芸術家... であるってことでも、その役割を担うってことでもないんだ。定義なんかほっといて、とにかく自分自身であること。芸術ってここからは始めるんじゃないって、ただ自分のつくりたいものをつくるんだ。さっきも言ったけど、そう考えようとなかろうと、まだ芸術だと... 定義されてないことをやるのが一番大変なんだ。もうすでに芸術だと... 定義されているから、キャンパスに油絵を描くってのは簡単。なんでみんなすでに芸術なものをつくりたがりのか理解できない。それはオレたちを文化的に前進させるものではないんだ。

+ ジャア「誠実でない作品」ってのは何ですか？

RM 芸術っぽいもの、すでに見たことのあるものをつくらうとすること。日常使うのと同じ意味の不誠実さのこと。最高の作品とはいつだって心地のよい自分と接点があるものなんだ。

+ このグループに名前をつけるとしたらなんて付けますか？

RM 名前は確実にそのムーブメントを規定しちゃうから、名前なんてない。みんながひとつの名前に賛成だとは思えないし。だれがグラフィティってつけたの？

+ アーティストじゃないんでは、...

RM たぶん(外側の人間だろうね)、内側の人間は絶対賛成しない。さらにこれは、あるムーブメントは外側から、ほとんどそれが起こったあとにメディアが定義するっていう原点に帰着するんだ。これはいまから起こること。でも一度定義されてしまったら、それは死んでしまうんだ。歴史の一部と化してしまう。定義されてしまったら有機的な成長はもう望めないんだ。

+ 一度定義されたらもう成長することはない、と。

RM そうはいかないけど、少しは阻害されるだろうね... たぶん他の雑誌もまた違った記事を組むだろうし、間違いない本かなんかも出版されて。そういうことが起こるにつれて、このムーブメントやグループは開花や成長はせずに制限されちゃうんだ。

+ このグループに日本人は影響してると思いますか？

RM いくつかが言えるね。まず、日本には視覚的に洗練された文化があるってこと。漢字からしかそれを推測できないけど。また、日本人の情報吸収能力はすごい。全体的にビジュアルに対する理解があるし。さらにサポートもしてくれる：経済的に、出版物でやショーや単にプロジェクトでも。

+ いままで助けられてきたと思いますか？

RM すごい新鮮なんだ。オレは日本の芸術を理解してるって胸を張っては言えないけど、ここにあるのとは違った形の支援や理解がそこにはあるから。もっといえばヨーロッパでも... このテのアーティストの作品ってそれが生み出された国ではいちばん評価が低いんだ。なんでか分からないけど。たぶんこれは日本文化がものすごく洗練されてることと、ヨーロッパ文化の芸術やその歴史への理解や認識の深さや、新しいものや進んでるものへの認識によるものかな... アメリカなんかメチャメチャ遅れてるよ... たぶんそれが原因。理解の欠落が一番面白い作品を生む... もしもオレらがもっと理解の深い文化に住んでたら、そんなに積極的にいろいろやる必要なかったかもね。

+ あなたの目下の関心は？

RM オレより若いのに、バイアニアルやったりリクソみたいなことやったりしてメチャ金稼いでるヤツらがいるってこと。ヤツらは時代遅れの作品をつくって、古い戦略にすがってる。分かるんだけど、ハラ立つよね。

+ いわゆる芸術界が著らに同調するなんてことは？

RM オレらの世代が老いるにつれて、買う側にも使える金が増えて、やがて成熟していきんだらうけど... でもオレらのファンは友達みたいなもんだから。ダミアン・ロープかなんかの(芸術カチギの)収集家は、リネン油絵への理解があってみんな年寄りで高い金を出せて。でもそんな連中はアルミのパネルやスケボーに貼ったビニールの切り抜きを理解しようとはしない。これがオレのイライラの一因なんだ。作品を制限したり、限界を設定することで価値を確保するのは... スグー簡単。結局、今話してきたアーティストたちはシェアってことを重視してる。オレらはアイデアの流れを促進するためにここにいるんだ。もし上等芸術の道を行くなら、独り占めすることによって価値をもたせるだろうし、それがみんなの採った方法だけど、オレはそんなの受け入れられない。なんでみんなそんなことするんだらう。それじゃ作品そのものの素晴らしさなんか分かるはずなのに。

