

DAVID ALTMEJD AND CYNTHIA GIRARD

Hi David,

I don't know how to start the interview because usually, when I speak to you about your work, it's not like in a mirror, to speak to others through an exchange. When I speak about your work, I always have the feeling that I'm making it my own: like a thief who spends the night in a big mansion only to get out with the best pieces. Actually, more like a kleptomaniac, because my goal when I look at your work isn't to appropriate the objects/ideas that are the most valuable on the market, but rather the objects/ideas that really touch me personally. I would like to enter one of your shows and steal a tibia-object on which you etched the word "raccoon."

Since I am interviewing you, I suppose I have to ask you a question. An "interview" is to see "in between," like looking through a crack in a fence. And a "question"—like at the police station—implies wanting to trap you, to know the truth, by using a lie detector and DNA testing, because when I'm actually thinking of the scene of your exhibition(s), there is definitely a platform and cadavers and infinite possibilities of crime.

Do the werewolf beings know each other before the great platform? How did you meet them, how did they dig themselves a space inside you?

Hi Cynthia,

I would find it really interesting to know what "objects/ideas" you would like to steal, because I as well have a fetishistic relationship to objects and ideas. I am happy to know that you like the tibia on which I wrote the word "raccoon," because it's one of my favorite ideas. If you feel like it, you could write a little list of the "objects/ideas" that you like in my work. It would be really nice (I don't want to control the interview, I just thought it would be nice).

I will tell you about the "werewolf being" later.

If one night, by chance, the gallery door was open because someone forgot to lock it, as an intruder I could come in and steal a few object/ideas, such as:

- The bird. Actually I would steal all the birds, but then I would feel really bad about it and I would put them back, misplacing them because I wouldn't remember the order. I'd do it as fast as possible because I'd be afraid of getting caught.
- I'd like a tibia bone on which you wrote "raccoon."
- A piece of mirror, to keep the idea of reflection. I'd choose the piece of mirror in order to disturb the visual path that leads to the reflected object, slide my hand like in a magician's hat to touch the crystallized severed head, to touch it without seeing it directly. That's the way I'd like to touch a living man, without really seeing him, just as a reflected image, upside down, to see my hand in a hall of mirrors, touching it without seeing it, to feel like myself and another at the same time.
- I wouldn't know what to do with the flower, maybe make it disabled by ripping off a couple of its petals (one or two).
- Maybe a mirrored paper icicle, it's pretty large, and if I put it inside my pocket I'd have to crumple it—but I don't want to break it, and I don't want to get caught.
- I could take a head and put in my backpack, but I don't really want one, first because I already have one, my own, and also because of its weight, those heads look very heavy, as if they contained a massive black hole, or all the werewolves' dreams, their mental worlds seem way too heavy, they look like big rocks on your platforms.

So: a bird, a tibia, two petals, a piece of mirror, an icicle, and maybe a head but not for sure.

bye
Cynthia

Hi Cynthia,

It's so generous the way you look at things and you speak of things.

When I work, when I make objects (birds, bones, mirrored labyrinths and crystallized werewolf heads), I'm always conscious of their poetic POTENTIAL. I'm not very good with language, but I use my intuition to make pieces that will be open enough to encourage and accept a reading as active and poetic as yours. It's beautiful what you say about stealing the birds from my installation and placing them back in the wrong spots. It's beautiful when you say you'd like to touch the severed head without seeing it directly, but that you wouldn't want to steal it because its mental world makes it too heavy to carry. That's really satisfying.

What I like in the way you think is that it's not academic at all. Nothing is only intellectual. Everything is physical AND intellectual. Your appreciation of ideas seems to be physical. For me too. I like to fetishize nice ideas. That is why I make sculpture, objects. For example, I like the tibia with the word "raccoon" because I like the idea of writing the word "raccoon" on a bone. The possibility of taking the bone in my hands puts me even closer to the idea, physically. Do you think that conceptual art was born from a physical desire of getting closer to the idea? I don't think so. If it was the case, it wouldn't be so clean. It would be more fucked up.

Anyway, can't wait to see you.

bye
David

Hi David,

As far as conceptual art is concerned, I don't know, I think they loved the idea, and most of all they loved it as artists: to inscribe the idea in matter, like scribes.

The art object is dirty, it is commodity, it represents the bad market. They [CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS] are in close contact with what is universal and clean, they transcribe what is really important: the idea, the essence of art. As far as I'm concerned, it's a project I find infinitely romantic, like a harlequin, they are madly in love. I have my reservations, I like dirty things, lack of breath, mistakes, and sickness, that is what makes me and I don't want to deny my animal side, that is why I think that the making of the object carries the idea through the act of making. I will never be able to repeat exactly the same gesture, I am mistake, and I even think ideas are generally banal because we are limited as thinking beings, we have to create systems and to me, they seem exclusive.

In the poetry of making, there is a freedom that brings us elsewhere, as if there were an independent brain between the hand and the eye, away from the rational headquarters: that's where I think it starts to be interesting.

So then I think of a magpie, the one who steals shiny objects, and I think of your platforms, those sparkling cities with holes. Those holes in the platform from which we see the underside of the world or rather the world upside down as if the dream were reality, and the reverse, reality were a dream—but what is real, why is the magpie interested in trinkets? Probably because they shine. What I like about the tibia "raccoon" is that it's a tool as well, I feel like grabbing it, I'm sure it would hit quite hard, I could hit a man unconscious with the word "raccoon" and carry him inside my crypt like a spider; the spider in *Lord of the Rings* moves in a jerking and febrile fashion, I love the way it moves.

Yes, the tibia raccoon is a prehistoric tool meant to knock out animals, like the seal who sticks its head out of the hole to breathe. Or to knock out a fish if the ground is too soft.

Cynthia

Hi Cynthia,

I just came back from London.

London's nice. They drink a lot. They start at 5:00. I tried to follow them but it's hard. I went to the National Gallery. My god I really like Rubens. It's so intense and the flesh is too good. I also went to the Saatchi Gallery. There's a good painting show. Nicely installed. The Kippenbergers look great.

You know, I loved your show. Your painting is very satisfying for me because I feel a kind of fetishization of everything that makes it (the research, the gesture, the combination of ideas, the acrylic . . .). I would have liked to be a painter. But I'm stuck with what I have built. I always work inside the structure that I have set up. But it's fine, I don't feel trapped. I continually transform the structure, but from the inside. I would never want to do like Damien Hirst. It's so stupid. Those paintings have no weight; they're the result of a process with no history. But maybe it's interesting for that reason. But it's the opposite of what I like in art. Anyway, sometimes I try to imagine what my work would look like if I were a painter, and it makes me dizzy. Maybe it would look like the work of Wanda Koop, but I really don't know.

David

Hi David,

My head isn't anywhere right now, I'm leaving today.

I wonder what Wanda Koop would do if she were a sculptor.

I realize that my work is mostly based on what I deeply love, like my nightingale made me discover birds and their beauty, and my dog made me discover nature.

And you, what feeds your imagination?

Nature, and I guess the memory of visual things from when I was a kid. And I know it might sound narcissistic but my own work is for me a source of inspiration, not because I think it's great, but because there is so much in it that I have never seen, like accidents and weird surprises. But mostly nature.

Thanks Cynthia.

David 🇫🇷

This e-mail conversation between David Altmejd and Cynthia Girard took place in French.