

In Conversation with Sean

Interview by Katherine Dennis

When Sean and I got together to talk about his artistic practice it was inevitable that our conversation would take up politics. This segment sheds light on how Sean views the relationship between art and politics.

K: I'd like to hear your thoughts on the idea of a healthy democracy. Certainly there is a political tone to your work. Yet in the art world there is a lot of debate about whether or not art is inherently political or if art should be political. I'm wondering how you feel about the connection between politics and art and whether you see art as an avenue for social change?

S: Yes I do, definitely, but I don't see it as the only avenue for social change. It's important to have many different approaches. I do see art as inherently political. If you look at politics in the broadest sense then I think almost everything we do can be considered political. This is especially true for the kind of art that I'm most involved in - stuff that's out in public. The public realm is where politics happens, that's where the political exists. If you are doing something so visible to other people and using this shared space I think it's particularly political. That's not to say that everyone's practices are consciously political, that people know or even think about the politics behind what they are doing. But it's something I don't think we can avoid or escape.

There is a politics to aesthetics and aesthetics to politics. I don't think there is an inherently political style. In my mind, meaning changes over time, and it's all malleable and open for contestation. Therefore I don't think one particular style can be considered



Sean Martindale

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universally of a certain politics or universally rebellious. It can change over time and through different interpretation, but in any given moment, in any given context, it can be political and interpreted that way. Language is not something that is fixed. It's something that is socially constructed. We all play a big

role. Art is language, visual language. It's constructed by all of us, so the art we create - and how we speak about it - can be seen to either support or challenge the paradigm and structures in which it exists and of which it is a part.

“Never overestimate the information your readers have, but never underestimate their intelligence”

– Virgil Thomson, newspaper critic¹

1. Storr, Robert. 2006. “Show and Tell.” What Makes A Great Exhibition: Questions of Practice, ed. Paula Marincola. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibition Initiative, The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. 14-31.

A Slice of Life with Pascal

Interview by Katherine Dennis

On October 25th, 2011 I joined Pascal in his studio for a conversation about his career as both a contemporary painter and graffiti writer. The conversation turned to Pascal's role as an advocate for graffiti being a valid art form and how this practice fits into the context of Toronto. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

K: Let's talk about identity in the graffiti scene. You work under both your given name and a graffiti alias. Either way, you're quite honest about your identity. In some ways it makes you more vulnerable to being caught and charged but in other ways it allow you to do more and say more with your art:

P: I got into this to make sure in a way that the scene was healthier. It was important to me to give something that is regarded as a good contribution, not just by the graffiti scene but by everyone. That is still my goal today. To say, yeah I did do some throw ups on that wall that was half destroyed anyway and that I know is slated to be a new development. I have no problem putting my name to that. If someone really wants to take me to court, go for it. I have a great lawyer and I stand for what I do. I don't see myself doing anything wrong. I'm just adding a piece of art.

K: The dialogue happening around graffiti in Toronto right now is a very topical issue. What conversations are you trying to have with your art?

P: For me the biggest thing about living here in Toronto is that we keep saying yes to street art and then we say no to street art. Rob Ford shows up not knowing anything about it, claims that it's all vandalism and motions to shut the whole thing down. I'm trying

to bring the conversations happening on the street into an intellectual realm, and to the people who are interested in discussing these issues from every angle.

I think that the gallery can function as a forum. Let me take this slice of life I saw and put it on display. Lets talk about this idea today. I hope that fuels more people to talk about these issues. As a result we can further understand each other.



Pascal Paquette, What I've Learned in the Last Five Years (Empire Penguins), 2010