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訪談 安通·庫恩斯特

訪談者／高博修 Sean Gaffney

高博修：你的最新展覽、也是在亞洲的首次展覽，名為「Casual Magic」。對你來說，所謂不經意的魔幻意味著甚麼？連接貫穿這一系列作品的整體主軸為何？

安通·庫恩斯特：我很喜歡為展覽命名，你可能已經注意到，我的作品名稱都相當具有描述性。本質上，「Casual Magic」和所有作品都是一種對於光線的體驗、一種迷失方向或是重新找尋方向，我的作品描繪的是停滯的片刻，然而沒有任何答案。我的願望並非創建一種經過思考後就能成功獲得解答的細微敘事（mini-narrative），而是某種能永久暫停、而且能在那停滯的片刻中享受的東西，你可以在雜耍球、懸崖峭壁旁總在下降或上升的太陽或月亮這些作品中看到，在花朵作品中，則是遊玩於情緒感性與極度形式化和美感之間，在沒有月亮或太陽的風景畫作品中，也有這種對於時間的含糊不清，完全缺乏明白的解釋。所有這些東西融合在一起，並且以一種儘管幽默、但非常真誠的方式描繪了我所察覺的魔幻時刻，然而我只是一個過度真誠的人。

有趣的是，這次的創作相當好玩，我在工作室的大部分時間都在實驗、發現事物，在過程中試圖再現同樣的魔幻，在漫不經心和漠不關心之間產生這種相互作用，同時，也顯露出某種魔幻感。所以，展名「Casual Magic」是一種描述，也同時是兩種停滯的模式。

高：你是什麼時候開始繪畫/藝術創作？你如何確定那就是你未來的道路？

庫：我的家族成員中有許多藝術家，可以回溯到很久之前，但很少數以此為職業。博物學家、畫家約翰·詹姆斯·奧杜邦（John James Audubon, 1785-1851）是我的高祖父，我的成長過程中，家中有很多他的複製畫、繪畫原作和素描，這些確實滲透到我的作品之中，那種非常直接的呈現，就在那裡傳達給你。我的曾祖母有一些心理健康問題，但她晚年投入了大量時間創作精彩的版畫和水彩，發展出難以置信的作品，只有家庭成員才看過，但是令人驚嘆。她從非常不同的位置觀看這世界，而那就是她眼中的世界。

我成長的社區也充滿了藝術家，他們創作藝術品和工藝品，其實，雖然我一直在創作版畫和繪畫，但我本以為自己會成為一位音樂家，我不知道藝術能成為事業，念大學時，我認為繪畫非常退化、而且是最愚蠢的事，我的教授們確實讓我相信那是件過時的事，然而我在大學期間都有畫畫，但只是私下秘密進行，我一直認為自己不是畫家，而是廣義的藝術家，我只是覺得很難為情，直到大約四年前，我才將自己視為雕塑藝術家，並且私下秘密地畫畫。因此，近四、五年來我才欣然接受並承認我在乎繪畫。

高：談談你的創作步驟，你都是如何開始著手一件作品？

庫：我會先有個概略的圖像，才開始做作品，而那通常就是作品的標題。雜耍者、猴子、山羊，就我所知是如此，通常當某樣事物讓我在個人層面上產生強烈感受，我就會開始創作，例如《雜耍者》這幅作

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品始於我和畫家、雕塑家妮妮可·艾森曼 (Nicole Eisenman) 共用一間工作室時，我常常在玩雜耍球。某次，她不經意提到我太常玩雜耍球了，這就觸動了我，因為她是一位我很親近的朋友，於是我想：我要畫一幅妮可雜耍的畫，我畫了一年，但都很糟糕，因此，逐漸地，它成了主題，我會找一樣東西、雜耍演員、薩克斯風演奏者、動物，然後以它作為主題，不斷地重複創作，盡一切可能嘗試，使用許多不同的材質。而且我總覺得自己在一年中花了 1/3 的時間製作油畫、1/3 的時間製作畫板、1/3 的時間製作雕塑，我覺得：「這是我唯一要做的事！」，我把所有這些主題都在這些東西上運用，對我來說，這些主題就像電樞一樣，我已經知道它們是有意義的，剩下的就是發現更多，找到它的優越之處，超越老套的陳腔濫調。

高：你曾提過你都是取材自檔案庫資料，談談這個步驟吧。

庫：一但發現某幅圖像，我會進行大量相關研究，但它實際上並非一幅圖像，而是一個角色，紐約公共圖書館擁有驚人的影像資料庫，此外，還有大都會藝術博物館和我們這裡的所有其他博物館、以及流行文化參考和 google 搜尋，我都將它們作為廣泛的參考範圍。像鴿子，鴿子是我去年偶然發現的新角色，目前我正在創作一件大型公共藝術雕塑，我一直在做很多鴿子的相關研究，就像語言的符號學方法，譬如說你知道某人的名字，而且和他熟識，但是你怎麼能說你擁有這個名字呢？你就是他嗎？

高：我在你的作品中看到一個角色，讓我想起了「三猿」：源自於日本圖畫格言中的「非禮勿視，非禮不聞，非禮勿言」，你是否曾經取材自亞洲作品、亞洲美學？

庫：是的，沒錯，我最常描繪的是「Mizaru」（非禮勿視），那是我最早發現的亞洲意象。但是，所有我最喜歡的畫家，從奧杜邦開始，尤其是那群關注日本和中國圖像的法國藝術家，都是我一開始就愛上、至今仍然著迷的人，尤其是馬蒂斯。我和東方主義的整個理念有著複雜的關係，一方面，這是我所研究的東西，後殖民理論非常重要，而且你無法否認這種盲目崇拜所帶來的暴虐歷史，但同時，如果你看看 1700 年代以後（甚至更早）以來所有你最喜歡的西方藝術作品，就無法否認圖像的垂直性（來自中國和日本的風景畫）以及怪誕的理念，我最喜歡在博物館裡看到的東西就是非常怪誕的中國雕塑，以及那些陶瓷釉的中國馬匹，牠們張開的棕褐色和橙色鼻孔，我喜歡這樣的融入到真正的美術之中，這種藝術在亞洲的精神和美學以及知識層面上都獲得讚賞，這些動物具有意義和神秘的特質，超越了史塔布斯的馬（喬治·史塔布斯 George Stubbs, 1724-1806）。

當我觀看中國動物的圖像時，在整個歷史中，牠們通常與農曆與神話連結在一起，不同於西方藝術，牠們與階級無關，而是與神話有關。在西方文化中，一匹馬就代表著馬主人的財富，或譬如狗，狗代表了狗主人的貧窮，相反的，人們所認知的這種普遍文化神話中哲學面與諷刺面、更多怪誕面與平凡面的融合一直都吸引著我。

高：許多作品讓我聯想到伊索寓言、魯德亞德·吉卜林 (Rudyard Kipling) 的《原來如此的故事》、喬叟、甚至是愛默生的「透明眼球」隱喻，你有取材自直接的文學來源嗎？

庫：我喜歡那些故事，那些意象對我來說很強大，某種程度上，我喜歡伊索寓言，但僅僅是因為它的奇特意象，關於這種事，我並不是一個善於敘事的人，我喜歡看小說，我喜歡小說是因為它比圖像更加廣

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闊，那些故事、以及神話的文學面從未真正如我所願的讓我感興趣，在我所發現的來源圖像中，確實會出現些很多（如果不是香煙交易卡的話）這類事物的插圖或自然主義風格的插圖，我有點厭惡插圖的概念，因此並不適合我。

高：這次展覽的特色是各種作品以及各種媒材，我們有字形版、一群人像和動物、以及一些較小的雕塑作品，你能敘述一下遊走在這些媒材和風格之中，作品的演變和發展嗎？

庫：在耶魯大學時，我開始意識到我可以盡我所能的將繪畫作為創作實體，儘管每個人都告訴我，「雕塑或繪畫，只能選一個。」，我當時有個主意：把我所有的畫作都鑄成石膏模、嵌入東西、將畫作變成石膏，像壁畫一樣。我也把這些照片轉為壁畫，我把照片印在醋酸鹽上，然後將畫鑄到醋酸鹽上，我嵌入了很多東西，但是我並非真的想要創造壁畫，我厭惡用俗氣的方式將繪畫變成 3D，我認為我鑄造這些東西，它們就會成為一個系列，那麼就能達到我想要的廣度，有些非常抽象；有些很形式化；有些具有直接的象徵意義；有些是精心製作的；有些非常迅速，鑄造是一種將它們連結的方式，這確實解放了我，而且我為此感到興奮。

耶魯大學之後，我持續創作，接受了在巴黎為期 9 個月的獎學金，在最初幾個月，我完全與世隔絕，感受到另一種能夠非常自由地創作直接繪畫技法的自由，我當時也會攝影和製作字形版，並開始結合真正的油畫，回到紐約後，我開始教書，我叫學生們去買 10 張畫布，我想：「我要畫 10 幅畫，我要很努力地創作，不要將它們展示給任何人看，它們只屬於我。」這是我喜歡做的事，我就這樣持續創作畫了 10 幅畫，我當時非常開心興奮，不管之前說過些什麼，我最終還是展出了這些畫作，因為我對它們感到非常興奮。從那時起，我意識到我不必將它們單獨分開，可以同時並行創作繪畫、雕塑和字形版，就是這一份認可，所有這些作品都是我的，如果我將它們公開，一切都會變得有意義，對於我創作的每幅畫，我都說出同樣的話，但說得不太正確，進化是齊頭並進的。

我一直以來都在雕塑，而且沒有對於繪畫的那份尷尬，它非常真實，雕塑沒有那種包袱，你只是將材料塑造成形，我一直覺得這很自然，而對於繪畫，我就無法立刻感到開心，總是覺得雕塑比較自由。在巴黎時，我看到畢卡索的雕塑，並沒有將自己與畢卡索比較，但是讓我意識到，當你能夠將一部分的創作實踐視為一片完全自由的地帶，將會是非常正面的，這就是我看待我的雕塑的方式，一片完全自由的地帶。

高：「Casual Magic」還有一種新的繪畫風格，即是風景畫。創作這些繪畫的動機是甚麼？

庫：我的許多人物畫都沒有很清晰的背景，也許是球體、太陽或月亮、或一小片背景，例如地平線，但這對我來說是很新奇的，確實如此，我一直不太喜歡將人物放在某個特定地點這樣的想法，因為會讓它脫離了象徵性領域，但我一直都非常喜歡風景，我年幼時創作的第一批畫就是風景畫，因為我的家鄉小鎮是許多美國印象派畫家熱愛的傳統風景小鎮，我就是這樣學習繪畫的，而且，我最近了解到風景畫可以擁有自己的主體背景關係。

後來我看到莫內的睡蓮畫作，儘管很庸俗，卻是全世界我最喜歡的畫，如果你在巴黎看到這些畫，你會去看畫筆的筆觸，多半是去看那些睡蓮，但是這幅畫有一大部分（約略是畫作的 1/4）只是一根樹枝，只

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是一條向上穿越的垂直線，我認為這是這幅畫中非常有力但常被忽略的一部分。最終我才明白，我想「哦，這就是我要畫風景畫的方式。」，於是我就這麼做了，阿薩提格（《阿薩提格島的月出》，2019）就是第一幅，這次展覽中還有另外兩幅風景畫，但就是從那裡開始，那是我的起點，佔據大片空間、本來不該注視的那一部分讓我感到興奮。

高：那就是我看到「阿薩提格島的月出」的第一反應，樹木似乎是擬人化的，看到戀人們在左邊那棵樹上刻下的一顆心後，我才明白這是畫作的主題。

庫：我很高興你注意到畫作的這個細部，樹木的溫柔。原本我真的對這幅畫沒有很高的期望，當作另一幅我私人的作品，但現在我真的很喜歡它。我女兒約 8 周大的時候，我和妻子、女兒一起去阿薩特格島（Assateague Island）露營了好幾天，阿薩特格島是馬里蘭州（Maryland）附近的一個小島，島上有野馬，我本來想去那裡畫野馬，但是看到了月出，阿薩特格島上並沒有樹，我自己把它們放進去，這是我和我妻子的肖像，我內心很想保留這幅畫，但我也想將它展示給全世界。

高：歡樂似乎是你許多作品中反復出現的元素，例如 2020 年的作品《供奉》；愛或歡樂在你的藝術實踐中扮演著什麼角色？

庫：在符號學的意義上，我大部分的作品其實是關於恐懼，但也非常真實，我的多數恐懼來自於普遍的困惑，而那也是我正試圖透過我的作品去理解的，試圖找到某種清晰。由於帶著歡樂，大多數人會形容我是一個歡樂的人，我認為作品中的歡樂和我的外在表達是來自於恐懼減緩了的那份歡樂。就像馬蒂斯談論的愛，我的意思是：愛才是最重要的，沒有別的了。只因為覺得不酷，就迴避了關於美麗與愛戀的藝術創作，這樣的想法對我來說是荒唐愚蠢的，對於事物變得過分愉悅美好這樣的可能性，我欣然接受這樣的代價。

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Antone Könst Interview

By Sean Gaffney

Sean Gaffney : The title of your latest exhibition, and your first in Asia, is called "Casual Magic" What does casual magic mean to you? What is the unifying thread that connects this collection of works?

Antone Könst : I love titling shows. As you may have noticed the titles of my pieces are very descriptive. Essentially, casual magic and all this work is about a kind of experience with light, and a kind of disorientation, or reorientation. With all my work, it's depicting a moment in suspension, but really without any kind of resolution. My desire is not to set up a mini narrative that will successfully resolve when you think about it, but rather something that stays permanently suspended that could be enjoyed in that suspension. You can see that with the juggling balls, or the sun or the moon, always on the precipice of setting or rising. With the flowers, the kind of play between being really emotive and extremely formal and aesthetic. With the landscapes without the moon or the sun, there is also this ambivalence about the time. There's this very clear lack of definition. All these things coalesce and describe what I find to be magical moments in a really sincere way, despite the humor. But I'm just an overly sincere person.

The funny thing about all that is, the work is really playful, most of the time I'm in my studio is spent experimenting, finding things, trying to recreate that same magic through process. you get this kind of interplay between the offhand and the aloof. At the same time, it's pointing to something magical. It's a descriptive title. Two modes of suspension.

S : When did you start painting/ making art, and how did you decide that would be the path for you?

A : A lot of my family members are artists, going back a long time. Very few have been professional. The naturalist and painter John James Audubon (1785 - 1851) is my great great great grandfather. I grew up with many of his prints, original painting and sketches around the house. That really filtered into my work, that kind of presentation of something very direct, given to you right there. My great grandmother had some mental health issues, but spent a lot of her late life making amazing prints and water colors. She developed an incredible body of work, which only family members have seen, but it's remarkable. It's a view of the world from someone seeing the world from a very different place.

The community I grew up in was full of artists as well. They make art and do crafts. Actually, I thought I was going to be a musician, though I always made prints and paintings. I just didn't know you could make art as a career. When I was in college, I thought painting was so regressive, and the dumbest thing you could do. I was really convinced by my professors that it was this antiquated thing, but I did it all through college, but kind of in secret. I always thought of myself not as a painter, but as a broader artist. I was just embarrassed, until maybe four years ago. I saw myself as kind of an artist who made sculpture and I secretly made paintings. So, I just kind of recently embraced in the last 4 or 5 years admitted I care about painting.

S : Tell me about your creative process. How do you begin a work?

A : I don't start making a work until I know a rough image. It's usually the title of the work. A Juggler. A Monkey. A Goat. That's as far as I know. And usually the thing I start with is one I'm very compelled by on a personal level. Like

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with the Juggler, it started with when I shared a studio with the painter and sculptor Nicole Eisenman. I juggle a lot. She off handedly mentioned “I’m juggling so much” and it just touched me because she’s a close friend and I thought “I’m going to make a painting of Nicole juggling.” I made a year’s worth of drawings, and they’ve all sucked. So over time, they became a motif. I find one thing, a juggler, a saxophone player, an animal. Then I have that motif, and I just riff on it. I try it every way I can. I play with a lot of different materials. And I always feel like I spend a 1/3 of the year making oil painting, 1/3 making slabs, 1/3 making sculpture and I think, “this is the only thing I’m ever going to do!” and I use these motifs across all those things. To me those motifs are like an armature, I already know they’re meaningful. The rest is finding out more about it. Finding its edges. Taking a cliché and getting beyond it.

S : You’ve mentioned in the past that you pull from archival sources. Tell me more about this process.

A : Once I’ve found that image, I do tons of research on that trope. It’s really not an image but a trope. New York Public Library they have an incredible image data base. Also, the Met, and all the other museums we have here, also pop culture references, and google searches. And I use them all as broad reference scope. Like pigeons. Pigeons are a new trope I stumbled upon last year, and I’m working a large public art sculpture right now. I’ve been doing a lot of pigeon research right. It’s like a semiotic approach to language. Like you have someone. You know their name. And you get to know them really well. But how can you say you have this name? You’re like this whole person?!

S : One of the tropes I’ve seen in your work brings to mind the “Three Wise Monkeys,” : bear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil, which is from a Japanese pictorial maxim. Do you ever pull from Asian works, Asian aesthetics?

A : Yes, absolutely. The one I depict most is “Mizaru” (See no evil). That was one of the first times I identified that very outwardly. But, all of my favorite painters, starting with Audubon, specifically that group of French artists who were looking towards Japanese and Chinese imagery, those are the ones I fell in love with first and are still obsessed with, specifically Matisse. That whole idea of Orientalism is something I have a complicated relationship with. On one hand it’s something I’ve studied and post-colonial theory is something very important. and You can’t deny that kind of oppressive histories that comes through that kind of fetishization. But at the same time, if you look at all your favorite western art work after the 1700s, of even earlier, there’s no denying the verticality of the image, which comes from Chinese and Japanese landscapes, and the idea of the grotesque. My favorite things to see in museums are the very grotesque Chinese sculptures, and those ceramic glazed Chinese horses with flared nostrils in tan and orange colors. I like this incorporation into real fine art that was appreciated on a spiritual and aesthetic level and an intellectual level in Asia of animals that had a meaningful and mystical quality to them beyond Stubbs’ horse (George Stubbs 1724- 1806).

When I look at Chinese images of animals, throughout history they’re usually tied to the lunar calendar and mythology, they’re not tied class, in the way they are in Western art, it’s more about mythology. In Western culture it’s like there’s a horse, and the horse represents the wealth of the owner. or there’s dogs, and the dogs represents the poverty of the owner of the dog. Instead I’ve always been drawn to that kind of merging of this philosophical aspect and the kind of humorous aspect and the grotesque and also more quotidian aspect of general cultural mythology that people can recognize. And I just love that.

S : Many of the works remind me of Aesop’s Fables, Rudyard Kipling’s “Just So Stories,” Chaucer, even Emerson’s metaphor of the Transparent Eyeball, are there any direct literary sources you draw from?

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A : I love those kinds of stories. The imagery is powerful to me. I love Aesop's Fables in a way, but just for the singular images it conjures. I'm not really a narrative kind of guy when it comes to that kind of thing. I love reading fiction. What I like about fiction is it's broader than the image. Those stories, and the kind of literary aspect of mythology has never really interested me as much as I've really wanted it to. Where it does kind of pop up is in the source images that I find, usually a lot of them if they're not cigarette trading cards, they're illustration from that kind of things or naturalistic illustrations. I kind of bristle at the idea of illustration, so it doesn't get in there for me.

S : This exhibition features a variety of works and in a variety of mediums. We have glyphic tablets, a grouping of figures and animals as well as some smaller sculptural works. Can you describe the evolution and development of your work across these mediums and styles?

A : When I was at Yale, I started realizing I could make my paintings as much of an object as I wanted to, despite what everyone was telling me, "pick one, sculpture or painting." I had this idea to cast all my paintings in a mold in plaster, I'd imbed things, and make the paintings into the plaster like a fresco. I was also making these photo fresco transfers. I'd print a photo on acetate and cast the painting on to the acetate. I was imbedding a lot of things. But I really didn't want to make paintings that came out of the wall. I hate that. Where the painting becomes 3D in a really cheesy way. I thought I wanted to cast these things, they'd be serialized, and therefore they could have that range I want. Some are really abstract; some are really formal. Some are direct in their symbolism; some are really crafted over; some are really fast. Casting them would be a way to connect them. It really freed me up and I was excited about that.

After Yale I kept going with that. I had this 9-month fellowship in Paris and I was totally isolated for the first few months. I felt another freedom to make direct paintings very freely. I was working with photography and glyphic slabs and started to incorporate real oil painting. After I got back to New York I started teaching. And I was telling me students to buy a 10 pack of canvases and I thought, "I'm going to make 10 paintings. I'm going to work on them really hard, I'm not going to show them to anyone, they're just for me." It's something I love to do. And I was just going to continue to make these. And I made these 10 paintings. I just was so excited and happy, and I did end up having a show of those paintings despite what I said because I was so excited about them. And that's when I realized I didn't have to make them separate things, I could make painting, sculpture and slabs all alongside each other. It was just this kind of recognition. All this work is mine and if I put it out in the world it'll all make sense. I'm saying the same thing with every painting I make, but not quite saying in right. The evolution was hand in hand.

Sculpture is something I've always done without that kind of embarrassment about painting, it's just so real, there's not that kind of baggage with sculpture, you just form the material. That's always felt natural to me. For painting, it wasn't something I felt happy about right away. Sculpture always felt freer. When I was in Paris, I saw Picasso's sculpture, and not to compare myself to Picasso, but it made me realize when you can treat part of your practice as a total free-zone, it's going to be really positive. and that's how I treat my sculpture, as a total free-zone.

S : "Casual Magic" features a new genre of painting, the landscape. What motivated you to paint these?

A : A lot of my paintings of figures don't have background with a lot of definition. Maybe an orb, a sun or moon, or a sliver of background, like a horizon line, but that's new to me. So, I haven't always been comfortable with the idea of having a specific place where a figure is located, because it takes it out of the symbolic realm. But I've always been really engaged with landscapes. The first paintings I made as a young person were landscapes, because the town I'm from is a traditional landscape town for a lot of American impressionists. That's kind of how I learned how to paint. And so recently I learned that landscape can have its own figure ground relationship.

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What it really came out of was seeing Monet's water lily paintings, despite how cheesy they are, they're my favorite paintings in the world. If you see them in Paris, you're looking at the brush strokes, presumably your looking at water lilies. But there are huge chunks of the painting, like a 1/4 of the painting that's just a tree trunk. It's just a vertical line going up through it. I think that's a really powerful part of the painting that's looked past. And when it finally dawned on me, I thought "Oh that's how I can make a landscape." And I just did exactly that. The Assateague one (Moon Rise, on Assateague Island, 2019) is the first one, and there are two others that are landscapes in the show. But they start to open up from there. That was my starting point, just something that was taking up so much space that you really weren't supposed to be looking at really excited me.

S : That's my first reaction to seeing the Moon Rise, on Assateague Island painting. The trees seem personified to me. The lovers carving on the left one, after seeing that I realized that this was the topic of the painting.

A : I'm really glad you noticed that about the painting. The tenderness of the tree trunks. I really didn't have high hopes for this painting. This was just going to be another personal painting. But now I really love it. I went camping with my wife and my daughter when our daughter was like 8 weeks old for a few days on Assateague Island, which is an island off of Maryland with wild horses. I thought I would go there and make paintings of horses. But there was this moonrise. And there are no trees on Assateague but I put them there. It's a portrait of my wife and I. so much of me wants to keep this painting, but I also want to show it to the world.

S : Joy seems to be recurring elements found across many of your works, like in Offering, 2020; what role does love or joy play in your practice?

A : So much of my work is really about fear, in the semiotic sense, but also the very real sense. A lot of my fear comes from a general confusion. But that's what I'm also trying to figure out throughout my work, trying to find a certain clarity. With the joy, most people would describe me as a joyful person, and I think that joy in the work and my outward expression comes from the joy of the relief of that fear. Just like Matisse talks about love. I mean, love is the thing. There's nothing else. The idea of making art that shies away from beauty and love just because it's not cool is crazy to me. I'm fine with embracing it at the cost of the possibility of something being too nice.