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## Antone Könst Views Art as his Tool

By Maria Vogel, Art of Choice, November 6, 2018

ANTONE KÖNST paints in figurative abstraction that puts a contemporary spin on mythology and ancient imagery. He employs symbolic gestures to discuss the meanings we hold deep in our culture and their validity. Könst's works are well balanced in their playfulness, composition, and underpinnings. Könst lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

*Your work spans many different medium and materials. How did you first come into art and how did your practice develop to include to many different techniques?*

I think of Art as a tool, its like a calibrator of reality and an instrument of agency. For a while when I was a kid I couldn't hear well, and I felt like I was losing my grasp on reality because I couldn't sense it completely. I learned I could use art as a tool to decipher and build my reality; the more that tool can do, the more I can do.

*What artists, living and dead, most inspire your practice?*

Nicole Eisenman really does it all for me. She's always trying something new and risky, she seems totally fearless but not at the expense of depth or purpose. She's one of the most empathetic and brilliant thinkers, but she doesn't shy away from forcefully stupid humor either, she shifts easily from an intellectual critique to the most vulnerable expression. And she makes things that are insanely fun to look at. She's got a real magic, for sure. But I love so much stuff. Audubon, Matisse, Chris Ofili, Huma Bhabha, and Sadie Benning are some of my favorite artists.

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*From where do you draw source imagery that finds home in your work?*

Most images I use are like sediment in a river bed; they've been floating around for a long time, and at some point, they just settle into me. Once settled some still seem restless, they feel real but unmeasured, or so close to meaning that they're perceptible, but barely so. Those usually surface in my work. Then I'll write little poems about them, dig through NYPL online archives to find similar images, or go out looking at stuff. I usually revisit images a number of times over the course of a few years – like I was saying about material, I think the more ways you approach something the more real it is.

*What does the beginning stage of creating a new work look like for you?*

I usually just start kind of recklessly. That presents lots of problems for me to work through, which I love. The Marxist artist William Morris said  $\int^{\circ}$  Art is one's expression of their joy in Labor  $\int^{\pm}$ . I agree.

*The natural world seems to play a large role in your work. Can you talk about this inclusion?*

I'm interested in the thing whose image isn't adequate, and I find a lot of that in animals, plants, and people. Nature and love are really linked for me  $\int^{\text{a}}$  when you love someone long enough they begin to lose their edges, their meaning almost evaporates, and you recognize that they exceed their image. They become like nature, like flowers or wind – boundless. Love is the act of embracing that sublime boundlessness of nature and Art helps us recognize it.

*Your work seems to take on a playful air. Do you think it's important to retain some underlying humor in what you are creating?*

Yes! I think play creates a logic other than the dominant one; that's as essential in art as it is in life. And

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while I think humor and playfulness are not necessarily linked, humor tends to intervene in my natural seriousness, as a result of play. My first move is always to try something before over-thinking it, and that might be so amusing and surprising to me I have to keep it.

*What was the best piece of advice you ever received from a fellow artist?*

While I'm thinking about play, Richard Tuttle said "if you think art is play you will not have either, but if you think play is art you might have both."

*What's up next for you? What has you excited right now?*

I'll be showing a drawing for the first time, at Beers Gallery in London in late November.

It's been exciting to watch how people interact with my newest sculpture, Free Peddler, at Socrates Sculpture Park . It's an interactive monument to a Peddler, where her backpack is a shelf for free exchange, so it's interesting to see what people put on or take off – one kid took the socks right off his feet to give to someone else and took a pack of Ramen in exchange!

*At the end of every interview, we like to ask the artist to recommend a friend whose work you love for us to interview next. Who would you suggest?*

The Ugandan sculptor Leilah Babirye, who lives in New York now. We met at Socrates, and she's a badass artist and queer activist who's really inspiring to talk to and fun to hang out with.