

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Amuse

Harmony Korine on Art and Shooting Guns

It's all about following your instincts, and that applies to painting too

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Photography by ANA CUBA

Stepping into the Gagosian Gallery to check out Harmony Korine's debut London show *Fazors* feels like a sensory overload, as the primary colours from his large-scale hallucinatory canvases reverberate from the walls and attack the eyes. Slapdash smudges of acrylic, house paint and oilstick are pressed into the canvas, leaving a trail of congealed paint and fingerprints beneath the surface of each seemingly precise ring.

It's this sense of urgency that connects Harmony Korine's films with his paintings. There's this arresting energy, much like his Dogme film *Julien Donkey-Boy* – an emotionally charged intensity that holds you in its gaze and forces you to look deeper, to try and understand it, to try and make logic. But that's kind of the point. It's instinctive, not overly theorised and yet innately realist.

His forray into the artworld started in the early 90s, where he exhibited drawings, photography and collages in a number of sporadic group shows with friends Dan Colen and Dash Snow in New York. Now Harmony is living back in his hometown of Nashville and taking things a bit slower than before. But with Larry Gagosian on board, two films on the go, and numerous

museums picking up his unrealised film projects, *Amuse* sat down with Harmony in London to discuss hanging with Viennese actionists, turning his art collection into a “freak-out space”, and the relationship between art and film.

How are you finding it being back in Nashville, has it changed much?

It’s a really mellow town, no one really cares, nobody sweats you, but it’s a lot different now in comparison to when I grew up. It was pretty much just rednecks, alcoholic songwriters and their kids – and I was just a skateboarder. It was pretty violent and untamed in a lot of ways. It was a pretty raw place to grow up, and now it’s become more cosmopolitan.

Have you found it less inspiring now that it’s lost that rawness?

Yeah, it doesn’t inspire me that much anymore. It used to be more country, it felt way more Southern, and now it’s just got this southern *flavour*. But it’s also a good place for me to work because I can switch off. I’ve got a big studio where I work and I’ll play basketball with a friend or shoot guns.

“I like to work as quickly as I can think”

How are you dividing your time between film work and painting?

I haven’t really worked on any movies since *Springbreakers* to be honest, so the artwork and painting has taken a bigger role over the last couple of years. It’s a much different process – I’ve been making movies since I was a kid and I love films, but they can also be problematic sometimes because they lack a kind of immediacy.

Yeah, there’s this thread of immediacy weaved into all your work, it’s like one stream of consciousness...

It’s always been the same for me, whether I was writing books, painting, taking photos or making movies. I try not to differentiate between them or have a hierarchy between any of them. It’s just always been about creating – the movies just became more what I was known for. It’s just about expressing and so the last couple of years, painting has become more consciously fulfilling for me.

Making a film is a much bigger, collaborative, less spontaneous process. It must be cathartic to channel that creativity with the spontaneity of painting; no assistants – just you and the canvas?

Yeah totally. I’ve never really liked the idea of being dependent on people in order to create, in movies there’s obviously such a financial side to things, you can’t really just make a film without hustling the cash. Sometimes—maybe it’s just my personality—but I’ll lose interest. I like to work as quickly as I can think. So painting has been nice in that way. At the same time, I feel like it all relates to one another: the movies, the paintings, the colours, the feelings and the kind of vibrations.

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When did you first start painting?

I’ve been painting since I was a kid and I made artwork and stuff, but mostly it was more

solitary. I had a couple of shows in the 90s when I was really young but the films kinda took over. Artwork was just something I mostly did in private or traded with friends and other artists. I'd show things sporadically but never really properly. I was always very tentative about it and then over the last couple of years people have been asking me to show more and more, so the concept of it became more real. I've really started painting more seriously over the last five or six years.

You've got a strong network of friends that are artists as well, how did you link with Christopher Wool and Mike Kelley?

It was pretty cool, it was like when I was a kid and I'd first moved to New York, I'd met Larry Clark within a year of moving there and ended up writing *Kids* and stuff. When I quit NYU and we started filming, I was living with Larry and so that was my first kind of introduction to artists and the art world and I was just, surrounded by all these people at the time like Christopher Wool, Cady Noland, and I became close to Mike Kelley at that time. I started showing at LA's Patrick Painter gallery and met a lot of artists through him. I was hanging with people like Martin Kippenberger and Otto Mühl and some of the [Viennese] Actionists. It felt like a different thing at that time, it wasn't so much about money like it is today. It was awesome: I got to watch it all kinda go down and in a very real, natural way.

Was it around this time you started collecting and trading each other's art?

I started making things in junior high school and high school, like fanzines. So I didn't really ever know anything about collecting art when I was young, but they were friends and I never had a lot of money, but whenever I did have some money I would try to buy something. I just always loved art and enjoyed living with and making it – the collection started off really small and things just grew.

So you must have a pretty good collection if you started in junior high?

Oh yeah, the bottom floor of our space in Nashville is packed and we've sort of started to install a bunch of it. I'll probably open it up like a kind of exhibition space and a freak-out space, just a kind of strange zone for people. We have all this stuff and it's kinda cool to see it in context.

"I just want to light it up, I wanna snort it up, I want to do it all. I just want to be the greatest that I can be"

Your work is very textural and vibratory – would you ever move into something solid like ceramics or sculptures?

Exactly, I would love to do something sculptural – if I can create something that has this kind of movement, and if it has a textural presence and it fucks with you, then I'll probably do it. These paintings are something that's more hallucinatory and trance-like. They have this physical component that I'm always interested in with art and movies. Something that goes beyond a symbol or articulation of something – it's like a feeling or a kind of energy. Any time I feel like I can translate that, I'll try it.

Would you ever try anything else, like theatre?

I've always wanted to do everything. I never want to differentiate. I was never about being the best this or that, it was always about fulfilling a singularity, I have a vision. Like I've never seen an opera but I know I could direct an opera. I don't even care about being good, I just know that whatever it is, it's meant to be that way. Even the mistakes and the failures are perfect. I don't

really care, I just want to light it up, I wanna snort it up, I want to do it all. I just want to be the greatest that I can be.

SO it's more about the intentions behind the creative impulse?

Yeah, the intentions are important because mediums are just different sounds really. They're almost like instruments with different sounds. And so it's like, at some point, maybe I'll just write books or something.

I heard about your movie *The Trap* (about an ex-con seeking revenge against a gangsta rapper, starring Benicio Del Toro, Robert Pattinson and Al Pacino) at Cannes last year – what's going on with it?

We were supposed to shoot it last year but we had issues with one of the actors, so we were meant to start shooting it this May but I have a tendency to lose interest really fast. I was so close to doing it too – I had the whole thing storyboarded and ready and financed. I'll still make it and I'll still be making a movie this year. I got antsy waiting for *The Trap* to happen so I wrote another script.

Your films really speak of the moment they come out – how important is the timing of when you make and release them?

Exactly, it's very important. So, I know I'll be directing a movie this year, whichever one happens quicker. At the same time, I've worked my whole life with film, building it up to a point where this specific language is a vernacular for a specific type of film that's aligned with me or my ideas, and at this point, I really feel like I'm just getting to the point where I'm capable of doing what I was meant to do.

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