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ARTNEWS

‘I just attack everything, I just love it all’: Harmony Korine On His New Films, Gagosian, and Gucci Mane

Andrew Marzoni



Harmony Korine

Harmony Korine wrote the script for Larry Clark's Kids at the age of 19, and then went on to write and direct films such as Gummo, Julien Donkey-Boy, and Mister Lonely. His 2013 film Spring Breakers was recently named, in a comprehensive BBC poll, one of the top 100 films of the century. He is also an artist who has had solo exhibitions at Gagosian Gallery, and his work was exhibited in this summer's Atlanta Biennial. Andrew Marzoni, who filed a dispatch from the Atlanta Biennial for these pages, talked with Korine about directing Rihanna music videos, the legacy of Kids, and how one of his paintings was mysteriously stolen from the Puck Building in SoHo.

ARTnews: You live in Nashville, and a lot of your films are set in the South. Is the South, as a region, somehow important to your work?

Korine: To me, that was more interesting before people got satellite dishes in Appalachia. Because I think once that happened, the regionalism kind of began to melt and become something else. And actually, when people in the South were more isolated and then they first started seeing imagery on TV, that was an interesting kind of transitional moment. Back when everyone was wearing Bone Thugs-n-Harmony T-shirts and listening to Lynyrd Skynyrd. That

was an interesting second in time. Now I don't really even know what it means. Living in Nashville, I don't really know, it's something different than it was because now I just feel like the world is becoming the same. If you're consciously thinking of what the South is and what the South means, I think it's something where you're looking towards the past. At a certain point, there were connotations and there were specific meanings, and culture, and language. Whereas now, you feel like that's mostly gone—at least I feel like it's mostly gone. It's very difficult to say. I guess there are certain artists who are connected by a type of geography, and maybe youth experience, but I don't know—past that I'm not sure what that means anymore.

Do you think that's because of the internet?

Yeah, that's what I was trying to say. As soon as everyone saw how everyone else lived, they all wanted to become the same. As soon as everyone heard how everyone sounded when they spoke, everyone tried to change their voice to that one thing. So this idea of regionalism is something that is more pre-internet, and it's wrapped up in the kind of romantic vision of what it was.

Are you interested in the internet? Does it have any influence on your paintings or your films?

I'm *so* not interested in the Internet. I feel like it hit a point a couple years ago where there was a plateau. You still use it, to find directions to a restaurant, or to read the news or something. But at some point, it stopped being so interesting. But that's just me. I never really engaged too much with social media. It's not so interesting. At some point it all just becomes noise and then you want to step back and live a real life.

One of your paintings was stolen from the lobby of the Puck Building last November. What does it feel like to be a painter whose work has been stolen?

That was pretty funny. I have to admit that when I heard that, I started cracking up. That was a pretty big painting, so it seems difficult to pull off something like that nowadays. I don't know how someone stole a 102-inch painting from the Puck Building. That was kind of amazing. When I heard about that, I thought, it almost seems easier to forge the painting. But I thought that was pretty spectacular.

Given that Jared Kushner owns the building, there seems to be something especially mischievous about the crime.

I just really wonder how that happened.

Maybe you could make a movie about your own painting being stolen.

Did they have a getaway car? Or what did they do?

Gucci Mane, who was in *Spring Breakers*, was released from prison earlier this year. Are the two of you working on anything together?

I love Gucci. I just visited him in Marietta [in Georgia]. I have a couple of things with him in the future. He's great. Definitely, there's some movie stuff.

Much of the press surrounding the announcement of one of your upcoming films—an adaptation of Alissa Nutting’s novel *Tampa*—has expressed excitement over your unique ability to depict the shocking world of the novel. Do you think of your work as shocking? Is that something that you are trying to communicate?

With that project, specifically—I haven’t shot it yet, it’s something maybe I’ll do, but I’m about to make something else first, I think. It’s like anything else, just certain things in life you’re drawn to. After reading that book, even I was kind of like, “Whoa.” There’s a visual component to it that’s interesting. I had never seen that dynamic before, and it felt like something that could be fun to do.

What do you mean by “visual component?”

I could see the world. I could see the palm trees, I could see the strip malls. I understood substitute teachers who only eat at Bennigan’s. I remember in high school, I used to have a friend who was a fake cholo. He was an amazing guy. I remember he used to bone the science teacher and she would buy him rims and spinners. And, you know, you don’t see that too often.

Since *Kids*, youth seems to be a consistent theme in your films. What draws you to making movies about young people? Is it just a “write what you know” kind of thing?

I don’t really know. The movie I’m about to make doesn’t have any young people, I think. The thing is, I don’t really know anything about myself. I just know when I feel good. So I don’t really question myself too much. I don’t spend too much time on introspection or anything. It’s more of a feeling that guides me. With characters it’s the same thing, and imagery, with the artwork, and the movies I try to create: it has more to do with a pull, a specific pull of gravitation. It’s just characters and situations I haven’t seen before. A lot of it comes from just wanting to create images, to see something in different ways that I haven’t seen. Or in a kind of sensory way. Where I hear and feel things in a specific way that washes through me or is above a simple type of articulation. So when I have that feeling, I try to make it.

Does painting allow you to articulate something different than film? Or are they just different things that you do?

They’re different but related, I think. I guess I’ve always just wanted to create, to make things—and the films, and the writing, and the painting, they’re all kind of interconnected. It’s all a unified aesthetic that comes from a single place, so I try not to overthink how it comes out. I mostly try just to make moods, just to play them all. Painting took on a much bigger role in the last couple of years, and actually, it became even more of a focus than the films. The process is different than the movies. At least it’s more singular, and in some ways more gratifying. With films, I always struggled with the *collaborative*. But with painting, I can just think it and make it, and you don’t really need to go through—the process is more singular. But with both the paintings and the films, I’d like there to be a kind of sensory component or a physical component or a trippiness to them that’s more like a feeling. Like something that’s missing for me. But again, I think they’re all different, but the same.

You’ve been represented by Gagosian for several years now. What has your experience moving between Hollywood and the art world been like?

It hasn't been such a hard departure, because for me, even having done shows when I was a kid, in my early 20s at Patrick Painter and Andrea Rosen, I was showing at different places back then. I think the films were always perceived as closer to art than mainstream commercial movies. It was just a commitment to showing work in public—that was really the one thing. Because the movies were always in some way like artworks. It all started to blend. Now, there's very little delineation between any of it. It seemed like the natural time. I was just ready to do it.

Do you have any shows coming up?

Yeah, I have a couple things. We have a show coming up at Gagosian and then a show at the Frist in Nashville. And there are a couple of other things that I'm working on now. So it should be a good year.

Your movies are art films—to me, anyway. But you are able to work in the pop world at the same time. You directed the video for Rihanna's "Needed Me," for instance.

I never really thought about the movies as art films. They are, but I always had hopes that they would be blockbusters. I always thought of them more in a commercial context or a pop context.

That's one of the things I really love about *Spring Breakers*—how it works on both levels, almost like a bait-and-switch. It's an art film, but it's also very pop.

That was kind of the point. I didn't want anyone to have to qualify themselves to see that. I thought it would be nice if teenagers saw it and had fun with it, but then there was this whole other side, maybe a slightly deeper pathology to it that was more like the residue of the surface. It felt like in order for the film to work it needed to be able to have some type of connection to a mainstream audience. Conceptually, it needed that.

Do you approach working in various media and commercial contexts in different ways?

No. I just attack everything. I just love it all. I try not to differentiate between high or low, I never thought like that. I just think that things are either good or bad, either interesting or not interesting. I can either make something beautiful, I can contribute to the greater good, or I can withdraw. I always just take projects as they come. So with the Rihanna song, I thought it was a great chance to do something interesting. It's just like anything, you just do it. I wake up in the morning and feel like writing a book, and I just say, "Okay." Or directing an opera. I don't know anything about operas, but I just feel like I can do it.

It sounds like you're working on so many things.

I'm in the studio now, just making paintings. I've been fishing a lot. I caught some humongous fish the other day. I got them mounted. I caught a weird fish with the face of a cat. It was pretty crazy. It wasn't a catfish, but it had the face of a cat. Actually, it might even be a cat, I'm not sure. I'm trying to figure that one out.

Harmony Korine's exhibition "Shadows and Loops" at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville opens November 4.