

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

DAZED

Talking art, cock moulds and revolvers with Harmony Korine

We meet the cult director to discuss moving from film to painting, a new collaboration with Chris Cunningham and playing dominoes in brothels with Al Pacino

Nick Chen



The art world, like everybody else, can't resist Harmony Korine. A filmmaker with an uncompromising eye for beauty, Korine has been passionate about painting since his teens, which makes his "Fazors" exhibition a must-see for fans. Visitors to the Gagosian Gallery on Davies Street in Mayfair can immerse themselves in the indie auteur's "fazor" creations – named after the sonic swirl of a musical oscillation. Standing tall with chaos in the brushstrokes, these psychedelic paintings burst with energy, but also bear the DIY originality of a director whose movie debut was praised by Werner Herzog for including bacon taped to the wall.

It's a logical step for Korine, an inimitable artist renowned for pushing the boundaries of film. After writing *Kids* at the age of 19, Korine chased a storm in *Gummo*, joined Dogme 95 with *Julien Donkey-Boy*, sent Herzog skydiving with nuns in *Mister Lonely*, delivered on the title of *Trash Humpers*, and curated the Britney-flavoured pop poetry of *Spring Breakers* – never forget that James Franco's "look at my shyeeet" speech tops any Shakespeare soliloquy.

We met up with the art scene's latest *enfant terrible* to discuss painting, secret film projects, and finding a revolver in Meryl Streep's handbag.

I've seen all your films, but I didn't know you've been painting all this time.

Harmony Korine: It's really just in the last couple of years that I started to put more of a focus on artwork – specifically painting. It's something I've always done, but mostly it was in private and away from people.

A few months ago, you had a \$120,000 painting stolen from a New York lobby. What's the latest?

Harmony Korine: I don't know. It was stolen from the person who owned it. I read about it in the papers, the same as everybody else. It was so big, I don't even understand how it's possible to pull that off. It would have been easier to forge the painting.

Do you have a message for the thieves?

Harmony Korine: I guess they did a pretty amazing job (*laughs*). That was something very special. It's kind of impressive.

Steven Soderbergh retired from filmmaking to take up paintings, but won't show anyone his artwork. Is there something confessional about painting?

Harmony Korine: I don't think they're confessional. I think they're similar to the films, and the films are similar to the writings. They're unified. Ever since I was a kid and I started making artwork and movies, I always viewed it as the same thing. There was a unified aesthetic. I never made a hierarchy out of what I was producing. I became more known for the movies, and that took over my life. I always wanted to make things and create.

How would you define “fazor” paintings?

Harmony Korine: I just kind of made the word up. The show title, “Fazors”, it's more that, with everything, I try to tap into something that's more inexplicable or closer to a feeling. I try to make paintings that don't have a fixed point, that are alive and moving.

They remind me of your Bonnie “Prince” Billy music video. How would you describe the energy you're going for with these paintings?

Harmony Korine: That's really it. There's something drug-like, almost. It's not so conceptually based. It's more like a hit. There's a physical component that washes over you.

Where do you make these paintings?

Harmony Korine: All the artwork's pretty much made in Nashville where I'm living. I have a nice studio there. It's a building we got a couple of years ago. We fixed it up, and the top couple of floors are my studio; the bottom is just a collection of art that we place down there. I work on the top floors and make the work. It's mostly intuitive. I was interested in a specific pattern, kind of like 60s stoner pop art.

What equipment do you use?

Harmony Korine: Mostly it's stuff you would find in drug stores or hardware stores. Things like mops or brooms or house paints or debris. Things that are just lying around the studio. I mix that up with nice canvasses. I'll use drop cloths or moving blankets. Really just whatever's around that seems to make sense.

You're known for pushing the medium with film. Are you trying to do the same with painting?

Harmony Korine: I don't think I can ever do the same thing with painting that I did with movies. I started making movies at a time when I had a very specific vision, and I was lucky enough that I could really play with the medium. I could really push it forward. At least for me, I could invent my own language. With painting, the history is so deep and so long, that if you really look, almost everything has in some fashion been done.

I loved *Manglehorn*. That seems to be your biggest film role, going up against Al Pacino. Do you like acting?

Harmony Korine: Yeah! It's strange, because sometimes I think I could have been the greatest actor, and other times I think I could have been the worse. That was awesome because I got to spend time with Pacino in Texas, just going to warehouses, juice bars and strip malls.

What did you get up to there?

Harmony Korine: In the warehouses? Mostly play dominoes. Pacino has this thing for playing dominoes in warehouses. He's really good. He beat four or five whores in a row – they were like master chess players. It was fun.

When Pacino knocks you to the ground in the film, is that what *Fight Harm* is like?

Harmony Korine: Kind of, except that *Fight Harm* was photographed a lot less nicely and lasted longer and was a little more gory.

Are we ever going to see *Fight Harm*?

Harmony Korine: I have nine tapes. I had someone come to archive everything, the *Fight Harm* video and my old writings. There are scripts I've written, other manuscripts for books, things from when I was really cracked out – a part of my life when I was walking around with shower caps on my head. My teeth were falling out. I used to walk with two fully-loaded squirt guns.

There are videos of that?

Harmony Korine: Yeah. Videos, artworks, writings, films. Things that never manifested themselves. Partial ideas. Projects that were abandoned. One of the things that should come out that might be nice to see is, Chris Cunningham and I made a film together 10 years ago. It's called *Mitch Poppins*. The editing of it's almost done. I think people will like it.

I loved *Manglehorn*. That seems to be your biggest film role, going up against Al Pacino. Do you like acting?

Harmony Korine: Yeah! It's strange, because sometimes I think I could have been the greatest actor, and other times I think I could have been the worse. That was awesome because I got to spend time with Pacino in Texas, just going to whorehouses, juice bars and strip malls.

What did you get up to there?

Harmony Korine: In the whorehouses? Mostly play dominoes. Pacino has this thing for playing dominoes in whorehouses. He's really good. He beat four or five whores in a row – they were like master chess players. It was fun.

When Pacino knocks you to the ground in the film, is that what *Fight Harm* is like?

Harmony Korine: Kind of, except that *Fight Harm* was photographed a lot less nicely and lasted longer and was a little more gory.

Are we ever going to see *Fight Harm*?

Harmony Korine: I have nine tapes. I had someone come to archive everything, the *Fight Harm* video and my old writings. There are scripts I've written, other manuscripts for books, things from when I was really cracked out – a part of my life when I was walking around with shower caps on my head. My teeth were falling out. I used to walk with two fully-loaded squirt guns.

There are videos of that?

Harmony Korine: Yeah. Videos, artworks, writings, films. Things that never manifested themselves. Partial ideas. Projects that were abandoned. One of the things that should come out that might be nice to see is, Chris Cunningham and I made a film together 10 years ago. It's called *Mitch Poppins*. The editing of it's almost done. I think people will like it.

Your next movie is *The Trap*. Have you started filming?

Harmony Korine: No. I'm still figuring it out. I was supposed to shoot it last year. We were two weeks out. I got as close to shooting as you could be, and then I had issues with one of the actors. We had to pause the film, and then the movie got pushed back on the dates. I don't really want to go into specifics, but it was more of a personality thing with one of the actors.

So, we put a halt to the film and recast the movie. We're supposed to wait until this May to shoot it. I just have this thing where I lose interest in things after a while. Even though that movie was ready to go, I have this other idea for a film. An idea kept cracking me up and cracking me up. I spent the last couple of months writing this thing, and I'm pretty much almost done with this script. I feel like I'm maybe going to do this new one first.

A different cast?

Harmony Korine: It's a totally different movie. I don't want to talk about the idea yet. But I will say, it's very funny. It's closer to a cross between a Cheech and Chong movie and that movie *Scarecrow*.

With your films, you talk about aiming for “sensory bombardment”. But when you Google that phrase, it comes up with instructions for waterboarding.

Harmony Korine: (*laughs*) Waterboarding is something else. With the sensory bombardment, I want something that's a total feeling, if you could separate logic from emotion. I want to make movies with a pulse, closer to something you feel in electronic music. Hence the loop-based trance focus on things, as opposed to narrative-based films.

Are you still skateboarding?

Harmony Korine: Yeah. I built a half pipe in the studio. But I'm older now. I'm more tentative with tricks. There's something so lame about being sucky with something you used to be good at. I have a lot of friends my age, that I grew up with, that still skate, and they're super into it – and I find that really depressing. I think they're just lying to themselves. I watch them, and they just suck. I don't really like the idea of doing things half-assed. I don't want to just push around. I want to tear it up. But I can't because I don't want to kill myself.

I've got to ask about the #OscarsSoWhite debate. Do you think the film industry is racist?

Harmony Korine: Definitely. But I think the whole thing about the awards is silly, because who cares about the awards? The truth of it is, it's the films that are the bigger issue, or it's the things being produced that are the bigger issue. The awards are just the end product of the fact that it's very difficult to make movies or get films financed with minorities. I know because I've tried. It's nearly impossible to do it on a high level.

People say it's an American thing, but it's not really. Films are international. You finance movies based on foreign sales. The financing won't support minorities. I guess that's why a lot more interesting stuff is starting to seep into television.

You had quite an anarchic life starting out, but now you've mellowed out and become a family man. What new perspective and ideas does this bring?

Harmony Korine: It's nice because I couldn't live like I did when I was young. I just couldn't sustain that type of living. I was very enthusiastic about narcotics. I wanted to go to a place where... I wanted to transcend it all and fuck it all up. I loved it. And it was fun. But you also get very easily debased. It's difficult to tell which way's up and which way's down. You can lose yourself.

Somehow, I came out of it. Creatively, it pretty much feels the same. Except when I was young, I didn't really know how to turn it on or turn it off. I couldn't really differentiate between the work that I was making and the way that I was living. It was all the same thing. It was a kind of performance. Now it's nice. I do my own thing. I disappear. I don't have to be anywhere for anyone. I have my own life and my family. And then I do my thing, and that's it.

Can I ask you about the Meryl Streep thing and being banned from *David Letterman*? Is that true at all? It changes every time someone talks about it. He said you were going through her handbag.

Harmony Korine: I can't really comment specifically because when you're chewing up two, three pounds of mushrooms, and you have a gold bar in your pocket, if you see a revolver just sitting in a purse, just like hanging out the side, what are you going to do? You're going to go pick it up and you're going to examine the revolver.

There was a revolver?

Harmony Korine: I'm not going to indict anybody, but, you know, you've got to react in life.

Harmony Korine's Fazors exhibition is on show at the Gagosian Gallery 17-19 Davies Street until March 24