

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Brett Amory

Posted by Dormain at **2/25/2009**



*It was another dark night at the West Oakland BART station, where I met **Brett Amory**. I was the one in the trench coat and the red leather gloves. He was the one in the white hoodie and glasses. The story continues...*

Growing up in Chesapeake, Virginia, Brett Amory was well exposed to creative people. His

mother's large family included a number of artists and musicians that intrigued and inspired the young Amory:

"When I was really young [...] I always had a really strong interest in art, but I didn't know what it was. So, I'd go into art stores and just look around. I messed around with paper mache and clay and I used to paint with watercolors"

He began playing trombone at age seven, and continues to play music, but became very involved in skateboarding after discovering the sport at age ten. After high school, Amory moved to Colorado to work at ski resorts and pursue snowboarding, but after a couple years he had suffered so many injuries that it was time to move on:

"I grew up skateboarding and always had a video camera [...] I didn't really know what I wanted to do, so I thought I might want to study motion pictures"

Amory moved to Bay Area to study filmmaking at the Academy of Art and began playing music with the artist, **Gage Opdenbrouw**. Through Opdenbrouw, Amory became more interested in drawing, but struggled at first:

"I actually failed my first drawing class, I was really bad. Then, I took it again and my teacher told me I was going to fail, but I luckily passed. Then I took a figure drawing class and the teacher [...] pulled me aside and told me, 'You better go to workshops or you're going to fail my class'"

That advice Ning Ho, the figure drawing teacher, proved to be a pivotal moment:

"I started going [to] two a week, then three a week, and then I was going every day. Then I started going to two a day, three a day.. That's really what got me into drawing, I just got hooked on it"

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Amory switched into animation, but wasn't attracted to the video game content. After taking a painting class, he was committed to fine art:

"I think it was color. I was drawing so much, but to actually work with color and solid shapes and masses was such a change from just line and contours and black and white [...] Color came more naturally than value and drawing"

He began a series, called "Waiting," which showed scenes of people in waiting situations, like at train stations or in grocery store lines. Meanwhile, Amory worked part-time at a Kinko's and would create photo montages in Adobe Photoshop when the store was slow. He found that these translated well to working with resin:

"I would build these resin blocks - and they'd work the same way Photoshop works - [using] acetate transparencies in between layers [of poured resin], so it [makes] a 3D kind of image by the use of transparent layers [...] The way the imagery sits on top of each other, you can have different opacities and some layers are transparent so you see the layer underneath it "

Next, Amory experimented with building assemblages of smaller paintings on panel, inspired by **David Hockney's** image assemblages and **cubist** works by **Pablo Picasso**. However, creating up to thirty smaller paintings for a single assemblages took up to three months each and he was anxious to continue to explore further. Amory became intrigued by passport photos and began a series of small portraits:

"The passport is - they're interesting photographs - they're not glamorous, they're informational photography. Usually people getting their passport photo are thinking they're going somewhere [...] They're like mugshots, they're not meant to be seen, they're only used for to leave and enter countries for travel reasons"

Starting with an anonymous passport photo, Amory would create characters for his subjects, eventually assigning names that would be reflected in how he embellished the character's portrait. But became bored with the series and longed to re-introduce a computer designed element:

"Photoshop and computer manipulation is a huge part of why I'm an artist. I started doing Photoshop manipulations before I started painting and that was one of the things that got me into painting. So, I always wanted to tie those two things together"

Inspired by **Chuck Close**, Amory shifted to doing larger pixelated portraits, and then began adding sections of realism, but constricting his painting tiny squares didn't feel right. So, after a seven year break, Amory went back to the 'Waiting' series:

"When I did that first one, it was like freedom [...] The first 'Waiting' series] was just about people waiting for stuff. When I went back to it [the second time], it was more conceptual"

Amory gathers his source material by taking pictures on the street of people waiting. He gravitates towards visible quirks and, by his own admission, a lot of his subjects are older:

"They're something about the way older people carry themselves. They seem to be somewhere else"

The disconnection between an individual's physical and mental

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location fascinates Amory:

"Waiting is anticipation of what what's to come. Most people, when they're waiting, they're not in the present [...] You can't really place where they're at - they're in multiple places"

To reflect the multiple locations of the subjects, Amory uses a computer to assemble multiple photos taken over time. The figure is repeated in the final work to show time passing:

"I think for me it goes back to film and motion pictures [...] My imagery - a lot of it is multiple images put together on one canvas. So, its the whole break up of time and space, and to me that's kind of what film and TV is"

Catch Brett Amory this Friday at the **Monster Drawing Rally** at the **Verdi Club**. He also has upcoming shows at the **Hyde Street Gallery** opening on **March 27**, at **DaDa** during the month of **April**, and with **Terminal 22** for the month of **May**.

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