

ARTISTS PICK ARTISTS: APOSTOLOS GEORGIU

Apostolos Georgiou interviewed by Rob Colvin
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Editor's Note: This is the fourth in a series of interviews with artists that will continue indefinitely, without direction, and outside any one person's control. The artists are asked seven questions about their art and their ideas about art. The questions are blunt, but open-ended enough to be answered in any way the artist chooses. The final question is a request for the artist to select the next artist to be interviewed – anyone they wish, well-known or unknown, working in any medium, anywhere; any artist whose work they think highly of, an artist deserving the same public interrogation.

The paintings of Apostolos Georgiou make a break with contemporary painting by possessing a self-styled humor that slips right past how we think about humor itself. When expectations are defied, a situation can draw laughter. But what in this artist's perpetually untitled work sets up an anticipated outcome? There is never a sequence of events. Taunts and jabs can also be amusing, making someone the butt of a joke. But what have Georgiou's figures done to invite ridicule? We find pleasure in seeing boundaries crossed, so long as no one's threatened. Have these characters violated conventions?

Whatever is happening in these works, it's happening reliably well, and it never happens in the same way twice. These absurd scenarios have a remarkable specificity, especially for works so reliant on drab colors and anonymous people. Each work, too, contains some salient disappearance, something gone wrong. We must work backwards to find out what's incongruous, even as we acknowledge that we'll never fully know what it is. It's not our expectations that have been defied; instead, we're robbed of an ability to know what we should have expected in the first place.

Georgiou's people, often alone (and even when together, still alone), are composed with a controlled flurry of deft marks and wide brush swipes. Yet, even when eyeless and without identities, these stand-ins for ourselves embody a vitality that requires reckoning with, eliciting our sympathy as we see their failure to see themselves. Artist Carol Szymanski recommended Georgiou for this interview series by saying, "I love the straightforward intelligence and grand finesse, and humor in his paintings – that is very rare."

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Rob Colvin: *Why did you become an artist?*

Apostolos Georgiou: I think that in the environment I grew up in, it was nearly impossible to escape from being an artist. Nearly all the members of my family were involved with the arts. I also grew up with the impression that I cannot face practical issues, take practical initiatives, or undertake responsibilities. Of course, later I discovered that the responsibilities of being an artist were even bigger ...

RC: *How would you describe your development and what you're doing now?*

AG: The first years, I was asking myself if I was a good painter. In the second stage, I started believing that I might be a good painter, considering that I was better than others who were considered good. In the third stage, I started believing that I was a good painter without comparing myself with anyone else, and in the last stage I concluded that I am an artist no matter if I am a good or a bad painter.

RC: *Have you been influenced by anyone or anything in particular?*

AG: Talking about my character, I would say that the most important factor was my family, the melancholic and heavy city I grew up in, my friends, my physique, the pain and the happiness I experienced, and the way I learned to face and handle my environment in order to survive. Talking about artistic influences, besides the great masters of the past, whose paintings I saw in our house library and illustrations of old encyclopedias, where there were more illustrated drawings than photos, I was also influenced by some local artists that I used to admire at the time. But they are completely indifferent to me today.

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RC: *What challenges are unique to your process?*

AG: Considering that I wanted to become a dancer or a jazz musician, an actor, an artist with more immediate contact with the public, the fact that I ended up as a painter, keeping viewers at a distance, provoked the desire to include some of the characteristics of the above arts into painting in order to make it more interesting. Not to exclude the dancer, the narrator, the actor, the clown from my art. To use painting as a medium and not as a message.

RC: *If you could own any work of art, what would it be?*

AG: Scenario no. 1: Mona Lisa. It is a symbol; it is a brand. There are even chocolate packages with its picture. It is an interesting procedure to disconnect it from all the uses it has been subjected to and manage to understand its real value.

Scenario no. 2: A huge painting by Jackson Pollock, maybe the one I saw in Düsseldorf. I was affected by its double character: simultaneously a great abstract piece of art and an epic renaissance painting of a great master. I could not distinguish which of the two it was.

Scenario no. 3: A great painting of a great unknown artist (I am sure that there are plenty of them), to have the joy to discover its value and at the same time to prove my objectivity by looking and understanding the image.

Scenario no. 4: A small Mondrian painting hung on the most discrete wall of my house, to tell me how much beauty simplicity carries sometimes.

RC: *So what is art anyway?*

AG: I would describe art graphically by two lines joining two points, A and B. One line is life. The second line, art, crosses the first line in many points and is much, much longer.

RC: *Who should be interviewed next?*

AG: I've chosen Eftihis Patsourakis for his refined and precise work and for the careful development of it all these years that I manage to follow him as an artist.

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