

MODERN MATTER

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Interview: Leo Gabin



What sparked your interest in popular youth culture, enough to make it a central focus for your artistic output?

It's something we've been looking at from a young age, but when we were in College, suddenly the internet became available to everyone. This was like having a library at home, an endless encyclopedia on popular culture. It was natural for us to explore this in our art. Especially the way people use this new medium to express themselves is so fascinating to us. We also became very interested in para-social interaction, where you know a lot about someone but they don't know you. Something that in the past almost only consisted between celebrities and an audience, but since the internet now consists between numerous random people to such a degree that you have more para-social relationships rather than real life ones.

Director Harmony Korine, with whom you collaborated in the conception of his recently released film, 'Spring Breakers,' is an admirer of your work. How did you come to work together, and what was the process like?

A couple of years ago Harmony contacted us because a former teacher of his, artist Michael St. John, had sent him a link to our site. He was very much into our work and contacted us right away. Since then we started to communicate a lot and collaborated on some different things. We have a lot of common interests and always send each other stuff to check out. He is a really amazing person and artist.

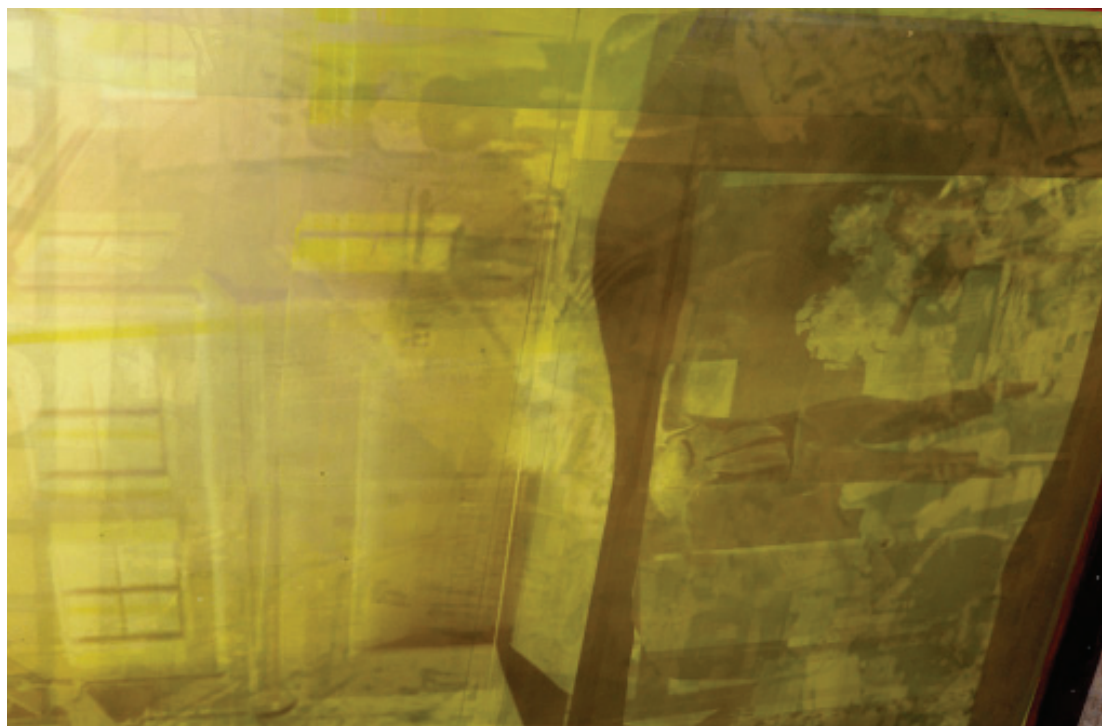
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You have also taught, as a collective, at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, from which you originally graduated. In your experience, how has art education evolved? Do you see a correlation between your lives, and the lives of the students you mentor?

One thing we noticed from when we were in college is that now more students start to collaborate and take initiative to organize stuff themselves, instead of waiting for things to happen.

In the New Holland Gallery, you installed an authentic replica of a teenage girl's room, complete with celebrity posters, and your video pieces. The barrier between public and private was demolished, with the audience invited to take part in the realistic simulation. I'm curious to know your motivation behind the piece – as an all-encompassing work it appears very absorbing. What initiated its creation?

The idea was to create a girl's room similar to where all this self-shot imagery is recorded, which these teenagers post online, giving everyone who wants to see, a glimpse in a private part of their lives. We all have become very accustomed to these images and are now part of popular culture itself. We based the room on one specific girl we came across online, through her YouTube channel we could see how her room looked, which stars she was a fan of, which school she went to. All the pictures in the frames are from her and her friends, even the college football team flag was the one she was rooting for. So once you entered the room you had this feeling of privacy violation but on top of that you were invited to sit on the bed to watch these videos where they cross these boundaries willingly themselves.



I really love your paintings: the incorporation of silk-screen images and their expressive quality recalls Willem De Kooning and Robert Rauschenberg. How do you compose the isolated image? Are the paintings geared towards a different engagement or response, compared to your use of other media?

We always collected pictures and videos we came across online that sparked our interest. These images we transfer onto canvas through the use of silk-screen, a technique we learned together in high-school and loved so much we built our own set-up in the attic. We prefer quick disposable images, which flood the web. Once in the studio these images can be randomly picked to become part of a piece. The paintings were the first thing we created together, the videos, sculptures and installations naturally evolved in a later stage.

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As your work references the proliferation of user generated media, and the idea of recycled imagery, I'm intrigued to know where you place ideas of authorship and validity in this ever-updated landscape (especially with regards to your own work and our global interaction with aesthetics). Are thoughts on authorship at all relevant when placed in this digital environment?

In this age of the excessive use of images, for us it's now more relevant than ever to use found footage and recycled imagery. Especially with an abundance of amateurish made "private" imagery put readily available online, the idea of authorship becomes even more questionable. But raising this question can be seen as the essence of the work.

In the cultural zeitgeist that your art embodies, we can be dominated by speed and intensity. How do you edit your consumption of online content for your art? I understand as teenagers you were attracted to hip hop rather than the history of art, so what kind of online content appeals to you?

Once you are looking at specific content online you automatically get offered similar things to look at, because of personalization technology used by search engines. We like to use this digital chain reaction and in that path we follow the selection and editing happens very instinctively.



Your work is mainly concerned with American culture (Spring Break, college parties etc.). In what way does your European background influence your perspective of these American phenomena?

We grew up with American television and music and there has always been a fascination for American Culture. But TV and music showed a filtered version, and once you had the internet there was this whole new window on this culture. A more clear view on how everyday people are influenced by it, our fascination also lays in the small things, like the interiors where people record their dances, the neighborhoods, houses, cars, ... Through self-shot imagery you have this other view of daily life, the less polished version, which is even more exiting to watch. Maybe being European we see a lot of similarities, but the small differences are very interesting, both socially and aesthetically.

Are there any projects you are working on at the moment, or potential projects for the future you would like to share with us?

Our videos have always been very short in the past, with a one-song soundtrack, like music videos. But now we are working on a longer video piece, a film that will be about 60 or maybe even 90 minutes.

Interview by Alex Bennett. Images by Alex Salinas.