The Birdsong of Self-Reflexivity
Rhys Coren interviewed by Christian Viveros-Fauné
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***Christian Viveros-Fauné*: I'd like to begin at the beginning, basically for the purposes of keeping our American audience well informed. This is your second solo exhibition in the US, right?**

Rhys Coren: Yeah. I did a solo show in September 2018 on the Bowery. And before that a solo presentation at Frieze New York. But since then, apart from a handful of group shows in New York and LA, and the odd work on the booth of a fair, I've not shown work in the US in a substantial way in the past five years. [1]

OK, let's get to the basics then. How is the work made? There's a *trompe-l'œil* thing that I think very successfully tricks 99.9% of the viewers. I think that's, one, magical, and two, something that should be elucidated on from the get-go. So... you start out by drawing?

For me, drawing is the biggest part of what I do. It's also the part of the process where my headspace needs to be in a very specific state. It's usually evening and fueled by music. It's the flow state, almost an altered state, and it's the chaos. It's the bit I enjoy the most. It's the genesis of everything and where the conceiving of "ideas" happens. I'm just drawing with pen or pencil on paper. It's free and without any hierarchy or specific importance. That's essentially phase one.

But then there comes a time and context where I need to structure the drawings, which is the start of phase two. I go through the piles of line drawings, go through my sketchbooks, and I scan the pages in, digitizing them. That means I can easily adapt and layer the images and play around with them in a way that I couldn't with the physical sketch. I can assemble and stretch and crop and collage and fill whole areas with color, which then changes the space in the drawings.

I found a way where I work with more freedom with no fixed size or space — mostly drawing with hand gestures rather than with arm gestures. Then I compile these drawings and blow them up. The sketching is intuitive, but then I punctuate that with an analytical phase — I become my own editor.

So the works are made as compilations of lots of different drawings? By mashing them together? Is that where the analytical phase comes in?

I'm in a different headspace. There's something about this compartmentalizing of the painting making process, of breaking it down into these stages or phases, that frees me up. It's a cliché, but I really struggle with the open-endedness of the blank canvas on the wall, staring back at me. After the first mark, you never know when the last one will come. Working that way feels indefinite, adding paint on top of paint on top of paint, with each layer coming back towards you, like the painting is coming at you, chasing you. Once I've created initial drawings, digitized and mashed them and edited them, I get to print them out — make them analogue — and work on them again. That's phase three. I can cut up and draw over the printed images.

That's when the color kicks in?

That first part is just black and white. I sometimes make written notes about certain color combinations if that initial visualization is synonymous with the marks I'm making.

Wait... what notes?

I literally write down the names of colors and describe different textures as a reminder that I conceived of the image with a color combination in mind. The structure and space of an image is dictated as much by the combinations of colors and textures as it is the line, so I make a note of it. Once I've got that image in the computer, I apply areas of color as part of the mash up, and alter the space accordingly. Something that's also worth mentioning is that I mix and match drawings from very different times — drawings made years apart get squished together. The other thing about this process is I can be ruthless with the images, almost like someone else did them. I feel like a sub-editor going through a journalist's scruffy article.

And how do we get to what we are seeing now? The finished paintings?

I digitize that printed image once again, tracing the lines and vectorizing them, then I use a laser cutter to cut the drawing into a piece of wood or paper. Every graphic component of the images is cut out — it becomes an individual piece that can be pigmented and textured separately. I can hold every piece individually. The composition is set in stone, and each piece sits side-by-side, flush and perfectly interlocked. I create texture by spraying the pieces vertically, downward, using an enamel paint. If you don't mix it properly, or the room is cold, the paint comes out as a blobby rain. This creates hundreds and thousands of tiny, raised bumps of

[1] *Looking back, that seems odd. Until 2020, I spent a lot of time in New York. I did a residency in 2009, and ever since then, I was visiting at least once a year. It's a place that's hugely affected who I am and what I make.*

paint. Once I've done that, I get to fine-tune the color with a range of different spray affects, almost creating these falling mists of paint. This allows me to change the hue, tone, and saturation of areas of color by tiny, incremental amounts. There's no hand and brush and overpaint.

The piece comes out, I tweak it, it goes back in exactly where it was. Let's say I want a red to lean more towards purple, I take all the reds and spray a fine mist of blue over them. If you zoomed in, you'd see a mixture of mostly red dots with some blue dots; zoom out it has a purple hue. Like the Ben Day dots of a comic. If that red is too bright, I can add a fine mist of a muddy green — just a half a second of spray — and it desaturates that red by 1%. When you zoom in, it looks like aggregate in terrazzo marble.

Terrazzo is a perfect analogue. The end product is akin to marquetry.

It's that exact same connection or thought process that inspired the large terrazzo public work we made a few years ago.[2]

Once the pieces are painted... which is... what? Phase four? It's essentially a big jigsaw that has to be assembled and eventually framed.[3] It sounds labor intensive, but that's my most efficient way of going from "this" to "that."

Where did the laser cutting come from?

Just after I finished my BFA, I was back working at that art school as a tech when they bought a laser cutter. I was making animation, film, and sound. Nothing that physical, mostly all digital, and I was generating lots of vector files as a biproduct of the animation. As luck would have it, vectors were the file type needed to operate a laser cutting machine. The guy who ran the workshops — a friend — took one of my animation stills and cut it into wood.

And that was a eureka moment? From there you quit working with brush on canvas?

I actually never used a brush on canvas. I did a sculpture degree with added writing pathways. But, yes, it was definitely a eureka moment... and I immediately knew I'd found a process that aligned with how my brain works; how an animator's brain works, but it was a process where the same stage-by-stage thinking could manifest as something physical.

The interesting thing for me, when you look at the beginning and the end points of your process, is they could be considered at polar ends of a continuum. But you've come up with a process that allows all the initial play to go through filters and operating modes that enables you to synthesize all this stuff brilliantly. It's a big part of your wheelhouse. From looking at your work, from knowing something about how you make it, and knowing something about your influences — music, walking, cycling, etc. — it seems like there's an unending amount of activity that you're packing into the work. First of all, the works are four-square, they're not gargantuan, you're bundling a great deal of information and material into an otherwise modest format. To cite Marie Condo: you pack a tight suitcase.

My works are mostly modestly sized because most of my favorite work by other artists is modestly sized. The size draws me in, it's intimate. I'm of an age of collecting posters and watching a small TV; I learned to lose myself in images this size. And this thing about the tightness — that used to really wind people up when I was studying. Like I was showing off too much or something. Or that it was, somehow, deceitful. It's taken me years to feel comfortable straddling two opposing things — to have all this wonky freedom, but then be an OCD person working with immaculate, tiny pieces. It's a dichotomy. Like, I have this incredibly self-destructive, chaotic side to me. Though, actually, I've learned over the years that structure and routine is when I'm at my best. I have this gene, this mischievous gene, and that needs structuring, too. It's ordered chaos.

It's Dionysian, but you need the Apollonian alongside to make it work.

It's funny, I've struggled with this my whole life. I've grappled with this ongoing friction and "the integration of opposites." I've since been pointed towards the work of Carl Jung — it's all just basic Jungian stuff. It's *Chapter 1* level stuff. If only I'd actually read the thing I was told to read as an 18-year-old first year art student.

The remarkable thing is it still feels like there's intuition and chaos, but chaos in the sense that you're bottling lightning with every one of these compositions. I can't think of anything more hard-and-fast than doodles captured in marquetry, with drop shadows and other details, which is something I've always really admired about your work. Do you know about this distinction between *Huh, wow* work and *Wow, huh* work?

I've never heard of that.

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[2] *This is referencing 'Everyone I've Every Known', 9-metre-long public artwork made from terrazzo that sits behind the Bond Street tube station in central London.*

[3] *I spent years explaining the frames, but now no one really asks about them. Frames are normal again, but they weren't for a long time. My frames were my way of making these works screen-like portals. Combined with an absorbing, matt finish to the paint, I wanted to draw you in.*

Right... *Huh, wow* work generally seems to be conceptual stuff, and visually, it's not particularly singing; but then you get a sense of it, usually via language , or maybe there's a moment of visual détournement that operates as an explanation, and you go, "Wow." The *Wow, huh,* work is the stuff that is visually singing right away, and you get to the back of it, and you go, "Huh, there's more there."

Oh, wait, so there's something impactful visually, or graphically, that draws you in, but then there's an unfolding of another detail?

Exactly. I describe the synthesis of this as, and I'll take credit for the phrase — even though no-one is ever inventing anything in language — as "eye candy with content." Which is always my first reaction to your work. On average, people spend about 3-seconds looking at individual artworks in a museum. But, provided you spend the time, one of the basic things your work asks is: "How am I made?" In your case that's a terrific question, because the answers trigger more questions. For images that look like they're easy — and I say that in the best way — once you clock how they're constructed, there's a real spark there. It's provides for an element of constant surprise.

You know, I used to find that a real problem, too — this ghost of the process.

When I started to make still images after essentially having an animation practice, I had to change my thinking from the real-time, literal rhythm in animation to the imaginative space of painting. This imaginative space is sacred. But I felt like my process of making paintings was a hindrance, preventing people from entering the imaginative space of the picture; instead they got caught in thoughts of, "What is it and how was it made?" I worried that it was a distraction. Luckily, the artist David Musgrave gave this talk when I was doing my post-graduate study, and he described it as the audience "imaginatively reconstructing" the labor of the work. David repackaged this as a positive thing. It's a shift of perception, and that's all that matters.

Exactly, the two things aren't mutually exclusive. That's why, at a surface level, it's utter eye-candy. It reads one way, but the front of the image is at least partly about how it's made. So that the seams involved, the cracks in the surface, are something intelligent enthusiasts can get into. Your way of working is truly bizarre, because it's so complex, but the fact it works time and again as actual pictures is also tremendously compelling. There are very few people who find completely new ways of working, and you're one of them.

Thank you. I was just thinking about that. Or, rather, I was listening to Mark Bradford talking about his work, and the fact that it has as much to do with his process of layering, as with a certain time and place and social context. The process is the content as much as the content is the content.

I have no particular love for Julian Schnabel and his cracked plates. I thoroughly believe that's a gimmick. But I think your work requires deeper reading, precisely because it's so lovely on the surface. Your cracks are smaller and invite more adventure. Do you know Angel Otero?

Yes! You introduced me to his work!

Well, he's another dude who's taken the process of creating a picture that goes on a wall and reinvented it.

He did Heidi Zuckerman's podcast a year or so ago, and I was so blown away by how he talked about his work. He mixed up the literal and the metaphor brilliantly; it wasn't overly didactic, but he wasn't dancing around everything too much either. There was poetry and process. There was culture and materials. I loved it.

Memory is a big thing for Angel, and that's how his lived experience can live on in his process of *décollage*. He puts paint on these big pieces of Plexiglas, peels them off and starts making these works that are completely other. There are impulses, ideas, habits, habits of mind, habits of corpus... those kinds of things or influences are particular to you, too.

We had this joke when I was in my early 20s for the sort of equation it took for artists to make their best work. 50% was your influences, and we'd all pick 5 artists each, so 10% per artist. Then the other 50% was you, but the trick was you had to work out who you were. It's rare that any two people will like the same 5 artists, but if they do, when put through the prism of a unique "you," your work will always be your own. Angel knows who Angel is.

This idea of a mash up of your influences and yourself... or your many selves... still sits with me. Or, rather, I've started to picture it less like a formula, and more like this constant cycle or feedback loop. You have your influences, but also, once you've made enough work, your own work feeds back in, too. Output becomes input and the source material for something could be itself. For instance, the shadows in my work came from making a work without shadows, but because I took a load of pieces out to paint them, that created an actual shadow. It's like the work ate itself. And I think the more an artist makes and begins to believe in themselves, the more these moments get folded in.

Your practice is a recipe of all these ingredients that aren't properly stirred, and any one mouthful could taste totally different.

That brings me around to a couple of things. One is that Jan Verwoert quote you sent me, and the idea that motions and emotions and actions and intuitions and sentience in art-making are significant drivers of your work. I'll come back to that in a moment. The other idea is the image of a mature artist in the studio. There is a point at which, like you said yourself, you have enough work — enough work in mind, enough work literally behind you in your studio, enough work figuratively behind you, too — that you've got processes from which you can pick and choose as though they are palettes to apply to your ongoing work. I'm lucky enough to be pals with Lisa Yuskavage…

Oh wow. She said one of my favorite art things. She said, "I want to live in a world where shadows are gorgeous."

Right? Well, Lisa tends to bring me into the studio right about the time the work is due to go out the door. She has a big show coming up in LA now, so I took the train to the studio, and the latest batch of works she's done are… the best way to describe them is that they're studio pictures. As in Courbet's *The Painter's Studio*, or Manet's *A Studio at Les Batignolles*, or Matisse's *Red Studio*. Historically artists have made a few of those works in their careers, but Lisa has decided to go deep, and, after making an initial few, devote herself to rearranging a number of figures that she's been working with her entire career. They function almost like recursive characters in a Borges fiction, even after you boil them down to a square of pink or a vaguely humanoid figure in lemon yellow. But on that recent visit I saw exactly what you're talking about — the picking up of a master artist's motifs here and colors there, and their constant rearrangement. At that point, these disparate elements literally become the artist's own language.

Yes! But there are also times where you punctuate that cycle of resonance with a conscious or deliberate bit of content or context, and the work is way more literal, and the inspiration is more direct. If you do a show a year or more into a cycle of making work, there's so much reverberation and cross-contamination, it's hard to spot specific references. For instance, for this show, there isn't such an obvious theme to it. Every work has been on its own journey, but I've done shows in the past where it's been unmistakably about something, often that's the start of a cycle; a moment of pause or punctuation. I feel like I slide up and down on a scale of abstraction in relation to that timing. It just so happens that, for this, show, I'm the furthest I've been from the initial references for quite some time.

So there's no overriding theme or visual experience?

No, not that's easy to say here and now. With this show there are formal loops and wobbles and scribbles that some works have in common. Repetition and reverberation. There's a rhythm to all the work. There's a slightly moodier palette, too. But a lot of the drawings I used to create these paintings are old, and a lot of them are the rejects or misfits from other bodies of work.[4]

In the past I've made shows loosely about walking, about parenthood, about other artists I admire, about narrative structure, about urban landscapes, about stills from my favorite animated films, about dancing in a disco. I've even made a whole show about red, yellow, blue, black, and white. And when I say "about" I mean I'm happy for that to be a starting point for the audience to engage with the work. My exhibitions have always been quite disparate in their imagery, but I'd have tricks to link things, like a common palette or use a loose theme like the ones above to create some continuity. If I'm honest, I'm probably at my best when I'm not being too didactic about the connections. I'm at my best when I don't care if anyone cares about a theme. A friend once joked that I reminded them of Red (Morgan Freeman's character) in *Shawshank Redemption* during his final parole hearing — the one where he gets released despite seeming despondent. I'm not, though. I'm not confident either. But something just feels right with these paintings, especially going where they're going.

I want to return to the Jan Verwoert quote.

Jan came into the Royal Academy when I was studying there. The RA is an independent art school founded in 1768. In all that time, it never became an official university with an official qualification with official accreditation. So, to regulate the standard of teaching, they'd get art professionals to come and interact with the students in a way that was different to how most of the tutors would, to assess the school as much as us, and in just two brief visits, Jan did so much to shape who I am as an artist. Especially in relation to the idea of time.

[4] *I haven't made new paintings in over a year. I've just been drawing and editing old drawings with no particular end goal. The context of this exhibition came at a time where I was overflowing with potential imagery to turn into paintings at a time when I was feeling most optimistic about my work, because my main focus as an artist has been elsewhere. I've spent this last year doing a residency at a gallery that had me teaching animation to elementary school kids. I've also been developing a new public work for central London that I'm already 2 years into. I've also been making furniture as part of a collaboration. When Alex asked me to do a show, it was a case of going through everything I've been making for the sake of making and seeing what sung to me. I didn't feel any obligation or pressure.*

The idea of time in painting. That's real insider stuff. Now, you sent me these quotes, which is clearly stuff you've been thinking about. It's from the lecture called *Painting in the Present Tense*: "It's not so clear where the beginning and where the end is. The end is set by the return of the beginning and the beginning that returns in the end is not the same beginning as the white canvas. Time in art is not a clear beginning with an intention to an end, but the retrospective discovery or the production of the beginning. You create the conditions of what you just created. It's a very, very loopy, rhythmical time."

I mean, he might as well be describing any one of the paintings that is going into your show. I've heard other people describe this *durée* as "the extended time of painting." It doesn't just cover the first mark you make until the last, but all the ideas you had before and all the ideas you've had up until whenever that last mark is made.

As he's talking about this — it's a filmed lecture at The Walker Art Center — he has a Roland bass synthesizer, which is the synthesizer most Acid House music was made on. As a demonstration for how he sees time in painting, he creates a basic bass loop, and through oscillation and filters, feeds that sound back through itself and that creates that high-pitched *dooo-dooo dooo-dooo dooo-dooo* sound. He calls that "the birdsong of self-reflexivity."

The sound that shouldn't be there?

Exactly! Something new comes from something old by resonating with itself.

And what about the text you had for your show last year at Seventeen? The show was called "Ripple". It's nothing if not reflexive. I'll read it: "Resonance, reverb, repetition, reaction, riffs, rhythm, remixes, refraction, rumination, reiteration, recurrence, retraction, reproduction, reflexivity, relief, redaction, rotation, recollection, reduction, refraction." Feedback loop, right? Nearly endless? Almost a Möbius strip?

That was me pulling at that Jan Verwoert thread. Which reminds me — I've been thinking a lot recently about what it means to discover an entire lifetime of an artist's work in one go. Two examples of exhibitions in London come to mind: the Paul Klee show at Tate, and the Mary Heilmann show at The Whitechapel, where you got to see examples of work from Klee's entire life, and from 50 years of Heilmann's career. You get to see all that time condensed, and you get to follow the patterns that loop in an out of their life's work. It feels like, in both those shows, you could see where the resolution of one work was asking more questions and generating 2 or 3 more paintings. Like, at times, their work was self-generative. That's resonance, reverb, repetition, reaction, and so on.

Are you suggesting that some paintings contain an oeuvre? I was mentioning the studio paintings before, those are, essentially, an exercise in wrapping up.

I just find it fascinating that you can access everything. You can discover an artist now and see reproductions of everything. All that time, all those decades. There is resonance, you can see reverberation, things feel like physical sounds. Imagine discovering Frank Stella today and going backwards from all the 3D work through to the lines and shapes of the late 50s, and to absorb all of that in one go rather than experiencing it in real-time, year on year?[5]

One of the things Jan Verwoert jokes about is the lineage of macho endgame Modernist painting, the goal being to end painting. But then he praises Mary Heilmann for being lateral — he says she does an art historical "crab walk" and that she operates in "the key of adjacency". He refers to one painting, *Save the Last Dance for Me* (1979), as a "groovy painting that celebrates the continuation of painting." I love that.

I don't know why Hockney just came to mind. Do you look at him at all?

Oh yes. 60s and 70s Hockney blows my mind. They also had a show of his recent work when I was at the RA that I saw a few times, as the art school is beneath the Royal Academy museum. Why, what were you thinking about?

I've been exposed to a lot of his work of late. There's a collector I'm friends with, who recently loaned a massive trove of his Hockney works to the Palm Springs Museum. I'm privileged enough to have spent time with some of those works, and I was thinking about Hockney's work in relation to yours in terms of color, but also in terms of the fluency of both drawing and working digitally. I know that's more recent, but from the get-go he was a guy who wasn't shy about engaging with technology.

Going back to the idea of time in work, what about those *Joiner Photographs* he made? Those Baconesque

[5] *I have been thinking a lot about binging TV series from a time before online streaming. How the narrative structure of the TV shows was episodic, with a week between each viewing, and a year between each season. When I first watched The Wire ten years after it was first aired, I'd end an episode then watch the first 5mins of the next episode so the cliffhanger ending wouldn't make me too anxious. Then start from 5mins in and watch the next 5mins of the next episode. That wasn't how it was intended.*

photograph compositions of multiple disposable photos showing movement and varying perspectives in one image?

Exactly. There's the language of science. Or, rather, how the language of science redounds in some basic way to the visual. This has always fascinated him.

Hockney is the perfect example of someone that derives meaning from what he does. He's stubborn and won't be swayed. If Hockney was a band, how often would he be asked to play his early hits? I think he'd play his new techno tracks instead. It makes me think of Bowie's drum & bass record.

Now I'm thinking back to the last show of his I saw at the RA. It had his iPad drawings, and they were animated, so you saw a speeded up version of the making of each image. The drawings were constantly in this state of flux or state of being made. You could trace his finger moving and his decisions. You're following everything he did in the order he did it.

I'm impressed by the restlessness of his imagination. The guy never quits, he's got the bit between the teeth and he's never going to let go; he's constantly moving hither and yon, but with an obsessive idea of exploring visuality by any means possible. On that, tell me about playing the ukulele.

Ha. I have one here actually, and a guitar. I have them in a few places. I haven't had any formal training, but I'm into dance music culture and I've made digital music. Also, in order to create soundtracks for animations, I had to learn how to break chords down into their component notes and recreate them digitally.

Which mirrors your painting practice!

This going back and forth between analogue and digital feels so natural for me. It's how I'm most productive.

How old were you when you first got a computer?

I remember my uncle gave us his old Sinclair ZX Spectrum, which was essentially the first games console, but it came with a proper keyboard, and you could code these funny images on it. I'd sit for hours and just draw with code. I think I was about 9 or 10.

Well, there you go.

But when my son was born (6-and-a-half-years ago), someone bought him a xylophone and a ukulele. Basically, as toys. I started playing New Order and Depeche Mode on the xylophone, then progressed to nursery rhymes on the ukulele. Immediately, something resonated with me with the ukulele — playing these open chords with 4 strings. These 4 different notes working together to create something greater. And each chord has more in common than it has different, but it can sound so distinct and evoke such a different emotional response. C major, for example, is played on all 4 strings with the bottom A string held on the third fret. Then an A minor is all 4 strings but holding the top G string on the second fret. For both of those chords, 2 strings are ringing out the same note, and the other two are only incrementally changed, but the overall affect is so different. From there I learned more chords and learned to play along to songs. That progressed to guitar and, recently, piano. I've started to build an insight into how pop musicians from the past wrote their music. And what they wrote it on. Chords that are easy on guitar might be horrible on piano.

Something I really love is how bands can create so much music from a limited amount of signature chords. And how those same chords, played in a different order, sound completely different. And those same chords in the same order, when played by someone else, sound completely different. One of my good friends, who is both a bass player and a Josef Albers fan, likened that to Alber's *Homage to a Square* color combos. I love that idea. Visually, Albers was creating all these melodies and chord progressions with a certain palette in every combination possible.

Something else worth mentioning is how, when I play an instrument, I get this immediate bodily reaction to it when it's "right." In the same way you might laugh at something funny.

That's true, I completely agree with you about music... and cooking even. Are you trying to satisfy some of those basic brain reward centers in your work? Linking back to the *Wow, huh* stuff? Your work is very appealing at first sight.

That would be funny because my music playing is very unpleasing at first. But it does touch some of the same nerve centers. I think of the music as fuel. Or like the *Karate Kid* painting the fence and waxing the car. Am I strengthening muscles in a way that's adjacent? I don't know. I either play chess or play an instrument as soon as I get up in the morning for around 45 minutes. Depending on whether the people I'm playing chess against have made a move or not the night before. I might be conditioned for the day, but both activities condition me slightly differently. With chess and music, there's all this theory and practical application of time and memory, but at a certain point, you start to spot these patterns of analogous visual logic.

But there has to be some intentionality in your work? To exist as eye-candy, but eye-candy with content.

Yes. I start with this freedom or play, but then I really fine tune it. The post-production is so specific.

Like a perfect pop song! the 3-minute pop song. That's the grail.

I remember hearing Tal R respond to a question about one of his paintings, and he said, "I just want to get you on the dance floor." That got me thinking about all the production involved in disco and house music. At the point of entry it's about a raw euphoria.

Can we talk about the images again?

Go on...

Where do they come from? I know they come from your drawings, but before that? Without getting too Jungian about it, what artists are you influenced by? You mentioned Bruce MacLean. You've mentioned Brice Marden.

Marden is new for me, actually. My main favorites are Stuart Davis, Mary Heilmann, Elizabeth Murray, Jonathan Lasker, Carmen Herrera, Frank Stella, Gillian Ayres, Blinky Palermo, Donald Judd. Which reminds me, didn't The Whitney have the Davis and Herrera show on at the same time? Or overlapping? I was in NY at the time, I think it was 2016, and I remember walking back and forth between both shows several times. That was important in terms of my taste — you had the refinement of Herrera with the embellishment of Davis. Such different economies, but they got me fired up.

My first paintings were made from stills from of my animations. Those animations were of 1980s and 90s football kits — or soccer kits to you lot. I was cropping parts of the jersey pattern and making still elements undulate, turning the gradient fades of old Adidas and Umbro kits into moving waves of rave-y color. I removed the insignia and left the pattern, but by animating the pattern, I shifted it. It wasn't straightforward representing. I removed lots of the information, and made what was left move. When I took the frozen frames into painting, these reduced images lost something. This began a process of embellishment. Or collaging different kit patterns together. I had to create something more than what was there by combining images. I reduced, first, and then I embellished with cross-pollination. Around then I started to look at the painters I mentioned above and learned from what they did, too. And I guess that's where the feedback loop took off.

In this new show, I can see some typography, I can see shapes of letters from a piece of writing I did, I can see kit pattern, I can see album sleeve art, I can see white noise on an old TV, I can see my attempts to visualize sound through freehand drawing and dancing lines, I can see geometric divisions of space, I can see the shadow in a Hockney pool, and I can see my heroes... all at once.

To pick up on the synesthesia that's going on. You're talking across so many different disciplines, so many found observations and source material, it's fascinating. I know that when you get to New York there's a show I know you're going to want to see: the Alvin Ailey-inspired exhibition at The Whitney. As in the choreographer and dancer Alvin Ailey. It's packed full of painting, sculpture, drawing, etc., but not all the work is on the walls. There's a soundtrack and it's quite loud and evolving. There's no place you can be in the exhibition and not be affected by it. To top it off, there's a film loop that's constantly playing across the full top third of the longest wall of the fifth-floor gallery. You get walloped left, right, and center. It's complete chaos; it invites chaos; it's perfectly balanced chaos.

What's the rhythm in there like?

It changes because the music changes. And the film changes out or progresses. But one thing that's consistent is the color of the walls — a vermillion complimented with different shades of pink. It's one of the most enveloping and positively synesthetic shows I've ever experienced.

Ahhhh. I can't wait to see it. And could you adapt to that quickly or did it take time to adapt to that environment?

I had to go twice. The first time I knew I couldn't give it the attention it needed, so I left and went back. The missus and I easily spent 3 or 4 hours in there.

I did want to add. There's constant tension all the time in my work. It's something about opposing forces, even the digital and analogue. I'm not comfortable on anyone side for too long.

You're talking about the much-maligned binary.

Yeah, but that's exactly what rhythm is, what beat is. On, off, on, off, on, on, off. You can't create rhythm with a singular palette or tone, you need contradiction. On, then off. This, then that. Productivity through opposition.

I think you've just hit on the perfect place to end this conversation. What an absolute pleasure it's been!

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