

By Benjamin Genocchio

What are you hoping that your survey exhibition at Newport Street Gallery reveals about the trajectory and development of your practice over the last 30 years?

Because my career has been so deeply bifurcated, both geographically and stylistically, and because I have essentially chased phantoms down every wormhole and stylistic cul-de-sac, I am fully prepared to meet an artist that I do not know. What I am hoping for is that the basic mechanisms that drive the work will reveal themselves as a simple overarching trajectory through what often appears to be a swamp of rampant stylistic infidelity.

What are the new and previously unexhibited works that will be included in the exhibition?

This has been one of the most interesting and exciting projects I have ever taken on as an artist. Damien reserved the last gallery, No.6, for all new work. He challenged me saying that he wanted this room to not only tie everything together, but also blow the top off the whole thing. Tall order. Now, artists simply cannot make some of the best work of their careers on demand, these things flow to whole other natural rhythms, but the challenge was delicious. After years of running from the confining box that I felt 'Neo Geo' had suffocated me in, at this juncture it seemed high time to embrace 'all' periods of the work and try to bring it all around full circle. On this, both Damien and I were very much on the same page.

What are the threads -- themes, motifs, ideas, concepts, etc -- that link the different series and phases that comprise your entire oeuvre?

This is a question that I have been thinking a lot about over the last year or two while developing this project. One of the key words that keeps surfacing is 'parody'. It seems parody has been a driving force from the very beginning. I have been parodying what a painting is from the start, what a painting 'is' and 'means' as an object at all stations of its existence. This is clearly manifest in works as diverse as my self-portrait with logos (after Van Gogh), to my blue man series with the overburdening and hyperbolic frames (after Gauguin). They both address what a painting is as 'thing', its intentions, its desired effect, its implied status, etc, etc. Another thing that has become quite apparent is the fact that I am and always was a conceptually based artist, but a conceptually based artist that loves color and to build hands on physical things. If I stray too far from this paradigm in any direction, the work seems to lose something essential. Another aspect, perhaps even more important, is the idea that if one is going to develop some new conceptual language, what is the point of that language if it is going to stay mired in its own self referentiality like so much contemporary art? This language must be adapted to address the world at large and anything in it that the artist chooses to address, whether it be a 3 day tryst on some glorious drunken holiday, or the maddening political quagmire we now find ourselves in. That an artist was responsible for a particular look, subject, or product is anathema to me.

How did your move from New York to Bali in the mid 90s impact and influence your career and practice?

When I moved here I had every intention of not becoming one of those wispy characters that habitually wash up on these shores seeking to live the life of a romantic expatriot painting images of rustic local folklorica in impassioned daubs of gaudy pastels. I purposefully built my studio as a large white cube that could be equally at home in Dresden or Flatbush. I even had the entire first body of work I made here completely mapped out in my head before leaving New York. I was going to keep Bali out of my work at all costs, I saw myself as just another artist moving out of the city; it's just that I was moving a bit further than upstate. It was not until I had lived here a full decade that I realized that Bali had snuck in, through the cracks in the window frames, under the door, and through the vents. In 2004 I sat

contemplating was a just completed painting when it became abundantly clear, my pallet had completely shifted from industrial and safety colors that are very much the work I made in NY in the 80's, to these new and strange muted browns, green-greys, and grey-greens, and the composition was one that could only be described as coming straight from Bali's old 'Batuan School' of painting. So through no conscious effort it wormed its way in and took over.

What is the significance of the concept of the art object in your practice?

Well after all these years of flirting with film, video, and installation etc, it seems no traction was gained and I keep retuning to the hand made physical thing. At this point I realize that video and performance are other sports, sports that I do not play, and as different as surfing and golf. It took a while to wean myself of the guilt, the sense of shirked duty, but then realized, what the hell did I owe anything? Here are absolutely no rules, only structures to push and pull against. Tearing beyond borders and ripping apart contexts is my natural default mode, and often times I have had to dial it back because I felt the work was too 'out there' and would not allow people to pull focus and even begin to process it all adequately. I have a veritable slagheap in my studio basement here of abandoned work that rushed ahead of itself. While I love writing, and in many ways still consider myself a frustrated writer, it does not come easily, in fact, every time that I have agreed to write something for publication, it has turned out to be torture. Making art on the hand, both the physical and mental aspects is nothing but pleasure. At this age I finally begin to know myself, and it is in precisely in this soil that I see the greatest yields, and feel the greatest satisfaction.