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Artist Jeremy Penn on What Inspires Him About Karl, Diane and Brigitte Bardot

Sharon Feiereisen_March 18th, 2014



A favorite of **Diane von Furstenberg**, modern artist Jeremy Penn has painted **Karl Lagerfeld**, **Kate Moss**, **Brigitte Bardot** and **John Galliano** dressed as a Bar Mitzvah boy, among many other pop culture figures. Highly collectable, we spoke with the artist to find out more about how he picks his subjects, his creative process and what's to come.

theFashionSpot: Can you tell us a little bit about your background? Did you always think you'd make a career out of art?

Jeremy Penn: I attended art school at a very young age and continued my art education until finally receiving my degree in Fine Arts from Pratt in 2003. In many ways I am a dreamer. I never put much thought into the realities of having a "career." I just always knew that painting was an essential part of my being that wouldn't be sacrificed.

tFS: Do you think that ties into your being born and raised in NYC? How do you think that has affected your career?

JP: New York City is like that interesting-looking girl who has incredible sex appeal. She has multiple ethnicities and is rich with culture. She can open a beer can with her teeth while reciting Lou Reed lyrics but also loves the opera, Matisse and fine art. There is an unexplained energy to New York City. It almost seems that New York City is this mother that brings out the true soul in each of us.

tFS: Can you talk to us about your process when you're creating a new piece from start to finish?

JP: Someone once compared my artistic process to method acting. If I am painting a series of portraits inspired by 1950s/1960s Parisian culture, I will completely immerse myself in stimuli from the time period. At risk of sounding too cliché, I will be listening to Serge Gainsbourg while painting or ending the day with a Bardot film. We artists are very sensitive individuals. That sensitivity makes us highly affected by the energy of our surrounding environment. In my earlier years, this was more of a curse. It wasn't until later when I realized how powerful of a gift this sensitivity can be.

tFS: What subject have you found to be the most inspiring?

JP: It has to be Brigitte Bardot. I have painted her more than anyone else. I revel in the strength, the clarity of her gaze, the appraising, almost confrontational depth that her eyes seem to have. Her face speaks volumes about the way she lived (and continues to live) her life; a life lived to the full, a life of personal liberty and of being true to herself.

tFS: Have you heard from any of the figures you've featured?

JP: Yes, Diane Von Furstenberg. The painting, aptly titled "DVF" was later acquired by Diane and is now part of her extraordinary modern art collection. I have worked personally with some of my subjects and due to ongoing projects, I need to keep the names anonymous for now.

tFS: Is it hard for you to part with works when you sell them?

JP: Parting with the work is the easy part. It is the signing of the work and deeming it finished the challenge. There are two schools of thought about when a painting is finished. Jackson Pollock said, "You know a painting is finished the same way you know sex is finished," while da

Vinci said, "Paintings are never finished, only abandoned." Much like da Vinci, I feel as if this relationship between me and the painting are having some dramatic premature ending to a beautiful romance. A new painting begins, a new love is forged. And the process continues.

tFS: Interesting. To that end, are there any that you refused to sell?

JP: There is one painting I refuse to sell. It is called "Timeline." I painted this in 2009 and reminds me everyday to take risks with my work. This painting was made using encaustic wax and ink and after building several layers over three weeks, I lit the entire painting on fire. I had no idea what the results might be. With the flames out and the wax still soft, I took out my carving tools and began incising the painting. I have been offered a lot for this one, but this piece is priceless to me and will always remain in my studio.

tFS: Given your subjects, do you actively follow pop culture?

JP: How can you avoid it? It lives in our Facebook timelines and Instagram feeds. We are living pop culture.

tFS: Speaking of that, I noticed that you're active in social media. Do you see that as being a critical part of making a living as a working artist these days?

JP: At this very moment, we are living in a creative revolution. Social media has the power to propel a small idea into a financially backed business with a few clicks of a button. It is a fascinating time. I know artists whose entire careers are based upon their social media presence. Is that a bad thing? Not if you are capable of managing your career. However, I have seen a lot of instant art celebrities whose works have shown to not have legs. Being the "Gangnam Style" of the art world is not something to aspire to. The importance of gallery representation and healthy growth as an artist is something that can't be overlooked. Yes, I am active on social media, but I am also affiliated with a handful of art galleries both domestic and abroad along with a professional art rep who assists in navigating my career.

tFS: Would you ever create a piece on commission? Any figure you would never paint?

JP: I am often asked to do commissions and occasionally I will take on some. However, I really need to get to know the subject before painting them. I am not the kind of artist who you can just give a picture to and have me paint it. I have been approached many times before to do that, sometimes with very attractive sums. I simply can't do it. The reason being is that the essence of my subject would be non-existent. Research is a big part of my process and it is critical for me to feel the spirit of my subject. This adds a level of authenticity to my work that I believe to be most important element. Regarding any figures I would never paint, sometimes the most taboo subjects are the most fun to paint. I have a bit of a twisted sense of humor with a passion to bring topics to the forefront with a hint of irony. For example, I work with the ADL and for one of its NYC fundraisers, I painted fashion designer John Galliano dressed as a Bar Mitzvah boy during the height of his anti-Semitic controversy.

The Noble Barbarian, April 2, 2014

Jeremy Penn

Brooklyn-based creative Jeremy Penn is best known for his contemporary portfolio of colorful and abstract portraits of fashion's famous faces such as Diane von Furstenberg, Kate Moss, Karl Lagerfeld and Bridgette Bardot. Born in 1979 in New York City, Penn was classically trained in Fine Art at both the University of Maryland and Pratt Institute and has since exhibited internationally and received honors from curators of museums such as The Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Penn's work is notable for its prominent use of the color blue and the emphasis he places on the subject's eyes, exploring the initial feelings of a single gaze and the deconstruction of that moment in time. Here, Penn's conversation with us about his artwork, inspirations and style.

Was art always your first love?

Most definitely. I was pretty discouraged at an early age because I couldn't and didn't want to draw inside the lines. For as long as I can remember, I felt that art shouldn't have boundaries. Self-expression should be free and to understand that concept at such a young age definitely tells me that art was my first love.

What inspires you in life and in your artwork?

As an artist, you are born with certain sensitivity to your surroundings. Growing up, this can be overwhelming. As you get older, you learn to harness that sensitivity and draw inspiration from it. Therefore, inspiration can come from anywhere at any moment. A recurring theme in my artwork is the power of seduction through eye contact. Eyes hold an incredible amount of power. They never lie and they are always waging war. The power that our eyes have can be explained through evolution and studying the interaction of animals. To every Yin, there is a Yang. While there is a universal balance in life, there is also dominance and submissiveness. One gaze can make you feel like someone is looking directly into your soul. You feel it deep. Science has actually tried to understand the gaze between humans and what they can't account for is a few milliseconds of time where it is believed that you are actually looking at yourself. That is a crazy concept when you think about what that means.

You were born in New York City, so was I. I find that I take great pride and inspiration from that. Do you?

I take incredible pride in being from New York. This city has a major influence on my work. There is nothing simple about living in New York City. I can't live or work anywhere else because, like my earliest interpretations of art, this city has no limits to how far you can soar. This is a city of talented gladiators who are looking for more than the conformability of a white picket fence.

Your subjects tend to be more females than males. Any particular reason?

I grew up fascinated by the image of the god-like portrayal of the male form. I always wondered why women weren't portrayed in the same light as men. This curiosity continues to stay with me and has now become one of the biggest inspirations in my work. I began watching French films when I decided to explore how women were being portrayed in international cinema. It was when I watched my first Brigitte Bardot film, "Le Fils de Caroline Chérie", where I felt I was watching the first female superhero. I began to watch every film Bardot had ever done and I knew for sure that I watched someone who was capable of bringing the strongest male figure to their knees with the pout of her lips. Bardot emerged strong and sexually confident, a recipe that can make many men quiver. Thanks to ego, women's greatest trick is the illusion that men are in control. We all know instinctively that if there is a god, she is one smart lady.

I love the use of color in your work. Would you ever consider switching to black and white or muted tones?

I used to work in a lot of grey scales but that changed around five years ago when I switched to blues. The scale of blues that I use has kind of become my signature. Before there were 50 shades of grey, I was using 50 shades of Prussian blue.

I have another series of work called "The Deception of William Murphy" which is very muted in tone. In fact, it looks like an entirely different artist. In many ways it is an entirely different artist. It is a very deep and cerebral series of work. The pop art work is meant to be fun and playful.

Your pieces are also focused on celebrities. Is it more of an homage or satire of the celebrity-obsessed society we currently live in?

It is a bit of both. I am very influenced by 1950s/1960s Parisian culture and the icons of that era. I have painted subjects like Brigitte Bardot, Catherine Deneuve, and Jane Birkin many times over. These three women are amazing to look at, but I don't paint them because they are beautiful and iconic. While some artists paint celebrities for the sake of painting celebrities, I use celebrity-obsession to draw people into the work. The Pop imagery might capture your eye but there is something much deeper going on. As I mention earlier, the moment the observer locks eyes with the subject of my paintings, something very interesting happens that is explainable.

So you light your paintings on fire. Tell me about that process.

I love the concept of constructing by hand and deconstructing by nature. I work with encaustic paint a lot, which is pigment suspended in wax. Imagine crayons on steroids. The paint is melted and applied to a surface as paint. I understand that it is a self-sabotaging process to tediously create a painting and then douse it in flammable gel and then light it on fire. There is just something very freeing about it. Sometimes when work is too perfect, it lacks character. Very much like NYC, there is beauty and character in the roughness.

New York Post - Art of the deal

By Max Gross April 11, 2013 | 4:00am



Brooklyn artist Jeremy Penn's "Candy Coated Hot Lips" painting is part of the art-filled, 43rd-floor Trump SoHo penthouse curated by Indiewalls. Photo: Zandy Mangold(2)



JEREMY PENN BUGÜNÜN WARHOL'UNDAN FAZLASI

KADINLARI EN BÜYÜK İLHAM KAYNAĞI OLARAK GÖREN PENN İÇİN BAŞTA BRIGITTE BARDOT OLMAK ÜZERE GÜÇLÜ KADIN İKONLARININ ÖNEMİ BÜYÜK. MODAYLA DA GÜÇLÜ BAĞLAR YAKALAYAN SANATÇININ ÇALIŞMALARINDA GÜÇLÜ KADINLARIN VE MODANIN İZLERİNİ GÖRMEK İSE ELBETTE ŞAŞIRTICI DEĞİL.

Açık sözlü ve yaratıcılık konusunda son derece farklı bir isim Jeremy Penn. Hem genç olmasının hem de karışık teknik kullandığı işlerinde farklı disiplinler arasındaki bariyeri yıkmasının getirdiği bir güçle üretim yapan Jeremy Penn, pek çok kişi tarafından Andy Warhol ile kıyaslanıyor. Penn ile hem bugün olduğu sanatçıya giden yolda neler yaşadığını hem de en büyük ilham kaynaklarını konuştuk.

Genç Jeremy Penn nasıl biriydi? Bir gün sesini duyuracağını hep biliyor muydu?

Akranlarımdan farklı olduğumun her zaman farkındaydım. Hatırlayabildiğim kadıyla; çok hassasım ve

beni çevreleyen dünyada olan her şeyden etkileniyordum. Hayatın yoğunluğuna bir anlam verebilmek için çok zaman harcadım. Zaman zaman yıpratıcı olduğu oldu. Bu gibi hassasiyetler sanatçının yaşam gücünü teşkil eder. Sanat, benim kendi sesimi dışarıya taşıma yöntemim haline geldi. Benim, bu hassasiyetin bir lanetten ziyade bir hediye olduğumu görmemi resim sağladı. Bu sebeple sanatçı olunmaz, doğulur.

Dünyanın tanrıçaları olduklarını söylediniz, güçlü kadınlarla çalışmayı seviyorsunuz. Bu düşüncenin geçmişinizle bir bağı var mı; Jeremy Penn olarak isim yapmadan önce size ilham kaynağı olan böylesi

güçlü bir kadın?

Toplumun düşüncelerinin ve toplumsal cinsiyet tanımlarının popüler kültürde nasıl istismar edildiğinin hep farkındaydım. Kadınların baskımlı değerlerle algılanması hep ilgimi çekti ve erkeklerle neden eşit güce sahip olmadıklarını merak ettim. Brigitte Bardot'un 1950'lerde çektiği filmleri izleyene dek erkeklerin ne kadar savunmasız olabileceğini hiç bilmiyordum. Bardot, benim gözümde tüm süper kahramanların en güçlüsü. Dudak büküşü ve baştan çıkarıcı bakışları ile gördüğüm tüm silahlardan daha güçlü silahlarla donatılmış biri. Gözlerimin önünde güçlü erkek figürlerinin ezildiğini gördüm. Dünya kompleks bir yapıya sahip ►