

Black Pepper Magazine Marcus Jansen - The Vanguard of Art's Battlefield | Interview

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The Colonialist, 2021, Oil Enamel, Oil Stick, Spray Paint on Canvas
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Marcus Jansen was born in New York in the late sixties during the time of “Fun city” , countless strikes and protests. He was raised by a Jamaican mother and German father. Jansen spent his adolescent years in Germany and moved back later on to start his US military service. His experience in the military left a huge mark and changed his artistic realm forever. Marcus Jansen speaks to us through every paint brush stroke, and it seems as if the paintings are reflecting back our societal and political issues, that we still did not quite solved yet or should I say, ignored ?

Jansens œuvre d’art is more than a sharp knife that cuts through the slices of politics and society - it’s AVANT-GARDE ! The perfect mélange of expressionism, surrealism & graffiti art. With a 25+ years of international career, Jansen always has been, still is and always will be the vanguard of art’s battlefield. In his own words: “Art is the intimate act of war”.

Do you remember the moment you discovered your interest in art?

I really think it discovered me when I was 6 years old in a school art class where my painting of a male lion was selected to be hung in the Lever House, in Manhattan, among other works. It was an enlightening moment to have a first exhibition at that age.

Were you as a child often in museums and if so, what memory do you have of it?

When we moved to Germany, I traveled often to Paris and visited the Louvre. I remember being astonished by the architecture and cultural aspects of visiting a museum and being exposed to Europe in general.

I've read that you lived in Germany- how long did you lived there, and do you still speak German? How do you remember Germany?

I lived in Germany for 12 years and was educated in a town called Moenchengladbach in the 1980s. We had a large American military base nearby in Geilenkirchen. Germany was where I was exposed to many things culturally, historically and intellectually, but it was also where I first struggled with racism and discrimination. I speak German fluently, although my vocabulary is not as complex as it used to be 30 years ago.

You also studied art, right? Did you enjoy studying? I'm asking because oftentimes creative minds have hard times to be happy in universities.

I studied graphic arts and took other classes such as photography, technical drawing and color. I was immediately at odds with my teachers and decided to quit after the first year because I had problems following rigid directions and wanted to be free. I began a house painting apprenticeship instead, which is where I was introduced to house paint and oil enamels, which I still use today.

How did people become aware of your art and how did you make sure to be noticed?

I was part of the first generation on the internet in 1996, fascinated by how you could place images online and the world could see them. I'd say my first exposure was online and picked up by galleries very early on. I was able to also sell directly there and make living. This was a time when email was a big deal and fun, since it was new. Clients were eager to communicate, this was long before social media. I had early interest in my work which helped me support myself.

Was there a moment in your life when you felt like a failure?

Failure, no, but failing, yes. This is a very difficult profession—you are exercising a passion publicly and hoping others respond to it while trying to make a living and raise a family. But since I was never into just the money aspect of it besides paying my rent and taking care of family, I was just happy I could live out my passion and be free.

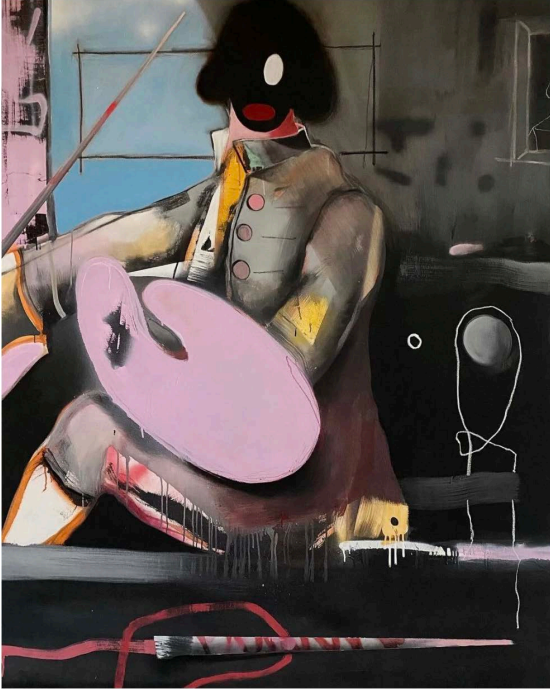
As a former U.S. Army soldier, have you been able to paint during your time of service?

I was tasked to paint our company logos, etc. at my unit at times, but painting seriously, no. There was just no time for that. The only time I started painting in the service was my last year in Vilsek, in southern Germany, where I did my first pieces from the barracks in 1997. I was preparing to discharge and start my new life as a professional artist, and that may have been my first portfolio of experimenting again.

Do you listen to music while painting?

Sometimes.

ALMINE RECH



Soldier of the Avant-Garde, 2021, Oil Enamel, Spray Paint, Oil Stick on Canvas
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What's your take on the current events like racial injustice?

My take is what it's always been. Racial injustice is a disease, largely caused by centuries of miseducation, or I should say lack of a more diverse education, in the Western system. If you mix that with an economic system that has historically never treated all people as equal, you have a strategic mess. It might be current, but more importantly it's history repeating itself as usual.

It's hard to be prejudiced once you actually meet people, but the economic and racial systems since colonial times were designed that way, and in order to change that, you would have to reeducate all the current minds and uproot the entire education system to reflect all the people's contributions, and not just those of European descent. Seeing yourself properly reflected in history is essential to curb racial injustice and instill awareness.

What does art mean to you?

Art is a form of life.... It's to search and find. It's much like science or spirituality, exploring new ways and possibilities to see and learn things. Art provides new vocabularies to communicate ideas we can't articulate with our primitive alphabet.

How many hours do you work on your paintings and how often are you in your studio?

It depends on size and topic, etc. I'm in my studio daily, just like any other nine-to-five job, although sometimes longer or shorter. I make my own hours, but I'm very disciplined about having a structure and do not paint on my family time weekends.

ALMINE RECH

Now a very personal question to you- you don't have to answer it! I lost my parents and had to learn how to deal with loss. Painting helped me to compensate my grief. How do you deal with loss?

I'm very sorry for the loss of your parents. I'm familiar with loss and what goes with it. I think a way to deal with trauma in general is to find purpose; this can be found in many forms, and can serve as a coping mechanism. To focus on what you have instead of what you don't have, helps. Afterall, loss is not really a loss at all if we see it more as a universal, inevitable transition like everything else in life. It's a temporary state of mind.

How intuitive are your paintings?

I trust my instincts more than my rational, intellectual side in life as I do in my art.

If you could change anything about the business side of art, what would it be?

I would have all resold artwork at auctions forced to return a percentage back to the original artist.

What can we expect next from you?

Last year in September was my 20-year anniversary exhibition in New York City with my longtime dealer Richard Beavers Gallery based on Brooklyn at Future Fairs. At the same time my solo booth at Art Paris opened as well. For this month I currently have my second solo show with Almine Rech in London (Jan 13- Feb 19) . A full schedule ahead.



David and Goliath, 2020 Oil Enamel, Spray Paint, Oil Stick on Canvas
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