

Joe Bradley.

I heard that you already know the title of your paintings before you start?

Sometimes yes. I keep a list going. I've got these free-floating titles waiting to become attached to paintings. It's helpful. The painting has to grow into the title.

Interview — *The painting shouldn't disappoint the title?*
by

Julie Boukobza. No, the painting shouldn't disappoint the title.

— *One of my favorite painter –Paul Klee– once said, at the beginning of his career: "I want to be as tough as a new-born, knowing absolutely nothing about Europe, ignoring poets and fashion, to be almost primitive." Seems like it's pretty relevant to your work?*

That does resonate with me. I like the idea of starting over with every painting. When you get to the point where you know how your paintings should look before you begin... you're screwed. You've limited your options. It's a difficult trick to pull off. The ghosts are all in the room whether you want them or not. Guston talked about wanting to feel like the "first painter" as well...

— *Yes Guston is a good example to talk about your work.*

Yeah, I love Guston. I love the abstract paintings and of course the late work. I also just love the Guston story, the trajectory of his career. If he had chickened on the late work, we'd be missing a really exciting moment in 20th century painting.

— *He said something like: "It's a long, long preparation for a few moments of innocence."*

Yeah, yeah, it's true. As a painter you are working all the time, not only when you are standing in front of the canvas. You know? "*You are what you eat*". What you read, listen to, look at, what kind of a human being you are. You are studying all the time, and when you paint, you've gotta let it all go.

— *You are painting even when you read comics or anything like that, right? Sorry Joe but I hate comics, and I knew that at one point we would have to talk about it.*

It's ok. No women like comics! But in my own defense, I'm not looking at Superman and Batman and that kind of stuff. I like the weird hippy sex stuff. Underground comics. Recently I've been collecting these second or third string underground cartoonists from the 70's. Most of them are terrible. I don't even really read them anymore, I just look at the pictures.

— *I guess I just don't make the connection between looking and reading, it's almost like a brain disease...*

Yeah yeah, it's a weird art form. Comics have stuck around though. I'm surprised they haven't just died out.

— *So you definitely don't like the idea of the pristine canvas, you like the damaged goods, the "intentional shoddiness" as you call it?*

Yeah, I really wanted them to be fucked up. I like it when they get just really disgusting.





— *You also always like to paint on both sides right?*

I have been. I paint on unprepared canvas, so when you paint on one side the pigment will bleed through and create something like... what do they call it?... “Pentimento”. I work mostly on the floor. It’s quite different than working on a painting upright, with a brush. It’s very physical. It’s more like what I would imagine sculpting would feel like. If the painting becomes unmanageable, I just wade it up into a ball and wait.

— *The first time I met you, you asked me to draw on one of your drawings, and I know that you do this a lot...*

Well, that was a special occasion. It’s usually just me working on these things. Up until this point, I’ve been reluctant to have anyone help out with the paintings. It could make for some interesting results though. I’ve been thinking about it these days.

— *It’s a way of letting go...*

Yeah. I’m not in love with my hand, you know. I’m not the kind of painter who just let’s it rip. The idea is to work on a painting until it becomes unrecognizable, so including some grad students in the process might be a cool short cut. I’m afraid it’s gonna be a very short interview (laughs)

— *Don’t worry, I’ve got so much more questions...*

You don’t mind the 30 seconds answers?

— *Not at all. So you’ve been drawing since you were very young?*

Yes. I mean that’s what everybody does right? It was what I was good at and I enjoyed doing so I just kept doing it. Painting I didn’t really discover until I was in college. Drawing feels closer to



my heart in a way. Painting is still very difficult for me. It feels foreign.

— Did you see the “de Kooning show” at the Moma?

I did. Twice. I kind of power walked through the first twenty years of his career... the early stuff I’m not so crazy about, but the “Women” and just about everything after. The drawings and sculptures are great too. What did you think?

— *I liked it too, he is not my all-time favorite but actually, some of the paintings from 55 reminded me of your work “Police Gazette”, “Gotham News”, “The Time of the Fire” but in a more nervous way.*

The abstract paintings with newspaper transfer. I guess that was an accident for him. It’s nice how they locate the paintings. They give them a time and place. For me, it’s really the Women. The Women from the 60’s are terrific too. They are just so goofy. It’s like slapstick painting.

— *I read that you also always see the body in your work?*

Do you see it? I always see it.

— *No, I actually started looking at a lot of abstract painters while preparing this interview.*

A good painting should have a presence, a kind of personality of its own. It’s not about painting the body, or the figure, so much as creating something that is alive in some way. Something that has a life of its own. I guess the closest parallel would be the human body. The body is like evidence of what’s going on upstairs. It’s a manifestation of the imagination. The way we look, the way we present ourselves. You know what I mean? It’s like that saying—“You get the face that you deserve.” So you get the painting you deserve...

— *I don't think your work is erotic at all...*

You're just not looking at it right! (laughs). Maybe it isn't. It's not something I go out of my way to inject into it. It is something I admire in others people's work...

— *What works do you have in mind?*

I was just looking at this William Copley book called "X- Rated". Have you seen it?

— *No...*

I think it's an exhibition catalogue. It's all these great sex paintings, they're just really funny and sexy. That guy had a lot of class. What about the Mona Lisa? (laughs) She's pretty cute. I finally got a chance to see the Mona Lisa last summer. I was standing behind like three hundred Japanese tourists, all crowded around it, taking pictures. I still can't tell if it's a good painting or not. I always feel guilty when I go to museums. Like, when I'm at the Met I kind of force myself to go visit the old masters. I always feel kind of guilty. Bored and guilty.

— *Do you think now is a good era to be a painter?*

It feels good to me. I don't know how it feels for other painters. I'm not sure that painting works like that though, it's such an individual endeavour. One person can say a lot with painting, it doesn't really depend on movements or some sort of critical mass. And it's slow moving, it evolves at a very human speed. It can skip a generation. I think the pace at which painting evolves accounts for some of the frustration with the medium. People want it to move like technology moves, and it doesn't.

— *Working with you through Almine Rech Gallery, you really seem to have your own pace and live in your own world.*

Full disclosure Julie!

— *It's true that answering to an email is not your priority in life...*

(Laughs) No, I'm not very good at it. The whole internet thing is just a fad anyway. I'm waiting for it to blow over.

— *You work for long stretches of time?*

I'll stay here for 6 or 7 hours. Mostly I just sit here and look. There's a lot of looking in my studio. I paint a little bit, turn it upside down, think about it. I usually work on 7 or 8 paintings at once. I've got twelve going now...

— *That's a lot.*

It's nice to have several going at once. I don't tend to overwork one if I'm juggling a whole group...

— *You think you overworked some paintings in the past?*

It has happened. I try to keep them around until they work. I'm trying not to throw away anything.

— *A curator from the Moma told me once about you "Joe Bradley is a real painter's painter". What does that mean to you?*

That's good to hear. It's nice to get a vote of confidence from another painter.

— *What artist gave you the best compliment?*

I don't want to "out" anyone...

— *Through one of your interviews I discovered Hairy Who (Chicago based artists from the late 60's) and loved their "outstandingly repulsive works of art", it's my new screensaver, how did you discover them?*

I was drawn to that stuff early on. I think I found a book on Chicago art in the library or something. It's great stuff. Those early Jim Nutt paintings blew my mind.

— *There are always a lot of books in your studio, last time I visited you in Berlin, there was this Otto Muehl's book that you seem very interested about.*

Otto Muehl is great. A real sicko. Yeah, I like keeping books around the studio. Inspirational material, you know?

— *What kind of book did you get recently?*

My wife just bought me a book called "The Popeye and Friends Knitting Book". It's beautiful...