

issue 7

spring/summer 2013

# novembre

**pratiques de l'art  
et de la mode  
en Suisse  
et ailleurs**

**arts and  
fashion practices  
in Switzerland  
and the world**

**Kunst- und  
Modepraktiken  
in der Schweiz  
und anderswo**

Alex Israel, Alice Rosati, Ariane Koek, Asher Penn, Aude Pariset, Axl Jansen  
Brett Lloyd, Daniel Feinberg, Elisabeta Tudor, Fabien Kruszelnicki, Georgia Pendlebury  
Guillaume Pilet, Ilja Karilampi, Jacquemus, Jean-Claude Gandur, Jung & Leuba  
Magda Antoniuk, Mai-Thu Perret, Marlen Keller, Mode Suisse, Natalie Yuksel, Nick Widmer  
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photography by Nicolas Coulomb, styling by Pau Avia, hair: Josefin Gligic, makeup: Anna Sadamori, dress: Givenchy, model: Maja at Nathalie.



# ALEX ISRAEL

in conversation with Timothée Chaillou



Alex Israel,  
2012  
Museo Civico Diocesano  
di Santa Maria dei Servi  
Citta'della Pieve, Umbria  
Photography:  
Ornella Tiberi



What is your favorite word?

Like.  
Sound?  
An optimistic saxophone solo.  
Element?  
Surprise.  
Feeling?  
Love.  
Flower?  
Bird of paradise.  
Color?  
Sky-blue-pink.  
Movie?  
*Shampoo* (Hal Ashby, 1975).  
TV-Show?  
*The Hills* (2006-2010).  
Gesture?  
Thumbs up.  
Book?  
*Less Than Zero* (Bret Easton Ellis, 1985).  
Perfume?  
*Bijan*.  
Drug?  
Kale.  
Sport?  
Art.  
Dream?  
America.  
Star?  
The sun.  
Song?  
*Good Vibrations* (Beach Boys, 1966).  
Fictional character?  
Ferris Bueller.  
Planet?  
Hollywood.  
Vehicle?  
My Prius.  
Virtue?  
Kindness.  
Poet?  
Jon Leon.  
What posters did you have on your walls as a teenager?  
I didn't have any.  
What was your most memorable day?  
I guess yesterday, because it's still fresh in my mind. I woke up and watched this week-end's episode of *Saturday Night Live* on Tivo. Justin Timberlake was the host and he was great. I went to my sister's house and hung out with my nephews. We went to lunch at the Jerry's Deli in Westwood where I had an egg-white omelet with spinach and tomatoes; then we went to the toy store. I had a small cookies-and-cream frozen

yogurt in a cup, from Malibu Yogurt, wrote a few emails from home, and then went to Venice Beach to a friend's house for a casual sushi dinner party. Shortly thereafter I was back home in bed, falling fast asleep. It was a nice, relaxing Sunday.

Do you think of yourself as a spiritual person?  
Sometimes.  
Do you daydream?  
Of course!  
If you were to be any object, what would you be?  
A pair of sunglasses.  
What is your most treasured article of clothing?  
It changes, but recently I'm really into my blue satin Los Angeles Dodgers Starter jacket.  
What decade had the best fashion?  
Of the ones I've lived through, I'd have to go with the 90s (I'm specifically referring to the early 90s).  
Who is your style icon?  
JFK. Julian Kaye. Dylan McKay.  
What is the best advice you could give to the younger self?  
I'd urge myself to learn how to cook.  
What is your deepest fear?  
I'm afraid of waking up and not remembering anything.  
Which is your favorite French word?  
Incroyable!  
What is your idea of debauchery?  
Carbs.  
What is your motto?  
#yolo  
What is your present state of mind?  
*Clueless*.  
For what fault have you most tolerance?  
The San Andreas.  
What is your preferred method of procrastination?  
Instagram.  
What is your thought on graffiti?  
The writing's on the wall.  
As a child, how did you answered the question "what do you want to be when you grew up?"  
Michael Jackson.

What wakes you up in the morning?  
Mr. Brown, my dog.  
Do you have a lucky charm?  
Nope.  
What is your favorite piece of art that you own?  
I own a few works of art, and I love them all the same.  
Could you please talk about your web series Rough Winds? How is it a Trojan horse?  
*Rough Winds* is an artwork and an advertisement, in the expanded sense of the idea of advertising. It is an exploration of the televisual and a landscape of Los Angeles, but it is also a product placement vehicle for Freeway Eyewear, my sunglasses brand.  
Could you please talk about *AS IT LAYS*? In which manner are you interested by the Hollywood truism that there are no new stories, and that many of the individuals interviewed in *AS IT LAYS* are simply living out self-assigned archetypal roles?  
Yes, history repeats itself. In many cases, the subjects of *AS IT LAYS* wrote that history and invented those archetypal roles. I admire the unique drive that these subjects possess: a drive to will dreams into real successes. I feel that an investigation of these figures-an effort to understand their personalities--is key to understanding my city and its culture.  
For your *Property* series [2010-ongoing], named after the prop rental departments on the Hollywood studio backlots, you «framed the rented props as sculptures in the gallery context through individual titling and presentation on white pedestals», and you framed them with a series of *Flats*, or back-drop panels, painted by Andrew Pike [a Warner Brothers Studios scenic painter] hang on the walls of the gallery providing «grounds for the rented-prop-figures. They were made not to refer to the horizontal cinematic expanse, but rather, to the window and doorways of the Spanish Revival homes of Hollywood's Golden Age. Their stucco texture, sunset colors, and

distinctive forms are all pat of the experience of Hollywood-ing.» What this «experience of Hollywooding» involve? Why did you choose to use this particular aesthetic?  
I grew up in Los Angeles. My father was a real estate developer. I've always paid close attention to the city's real estate, and in turn, to our regional vernacular. I see it as related to the entertainment system—first and foremost as a location for filming. Much of what was built during Hollywood's Golden Age was designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival Style. It's a style that makes sense here, given the Southern Californian climate, and it's also a design fantasy: a unique amalgamation of influences that harkens back to other romantic times and far-off places. It's everywhere, and it's a look that has become closely associated with the city, and with the Hollywood dream machine. It's for all of these associations and for its ubiquity that I started looking to it for shapes and texture. It's a background to my daily life when driving around the city, and so I've adopted it as the background for both *AS IT LAYS* and for my *Property* sculptures.

How do you choose the rented props you are using?  
Choosing a prop to perform the role of a sculpture is a lot like casting an actor for a part—I'm looking for a certain *je ne sais quoi*. When I find it, I can feel it. I'm very much in tune with in an ineffable, invisible quality that cinema props possess. This stardust or star quality is of primary importance to me when I'm auditioning the candidates in the prop house. Otherwise, it's a matter of form, symbolic and narrative content, reference to art history, examining how multiple props work together, and a number of other criteria by which I select them.  
You said that “props are sad, fake, and magical”, why sad?  
A lot of them get used and abused. Kathryn Andrews said «that props-the kind you can easily rent in Hollywood, which get returned at the end of the rental-would afford a «truer» readymade experience. (...) That it can only temporarily be the artist's work is of more consequence than how that question plays now around the traditional readymade.» I don't know if the readymade experience of the rental is

«truer» or less true, but it's certainly an alternative to the experience of the classic Duchampian readymade. For Duchamp the performance, the public gesture by which an everyday object was transformed into art, was the artist's work and responsibility. The object itself, the shovel or the urinal, seems to have simply existed in a state of quiet permanence. In my work, with the rentals, I see the props as taking on the responsibility of the performance. Each prop performs to convince the audience of its newly assigned role: art. My role is directorial.  
What do you think about Kathryn Andrews' work?  
I'm a fan of Ms. Andrews and of her work.  
You said that the rented props are like performers. How could they act? How do they behave?  
As I mentioned, I believe that they have ineffable, invisible qualities—this stardust or magic about them that affects the way they are able to perform as sculpture. It's a feeling, a vibe that they give off, and the most exceptional ones exude a kind of star quality—that's the best way I can describe it. I think of





« Ultimately, no matter where or how it's presented, the viewer decides how he or she wants to see the work—I've designed the Freeway Eyewear sunglass frames to hopefully provide a bit of assistance. »







them as inanimate actors.

What the pedestal podium recalls and allows that make you interested in?

The pedestal is a framing device. Along with selecting, composing, titling, and recontextualixing the props in a gallery, the pedestal aids in the process by which I take artistic ownership of the props, as my sculptures, for the duration of any given exhibition.

What aesthetic stakes do you use and produce by using such form, such space?

When it comes to form and space, I don't really think of the aesthetic stakes of *Property* to be very different from those that other modern and contemporary sculptors have faced. The works are always very carefully arranged so that the viewer's experience is almost choreographed. Sometimes I put a prop sculpture on a pedestal like a Brancusi, sometimes I'll put one on the floor, like a Judd.

By using pedestals, do you think that presented objects increase their coefficient of visibility?

The presence of a pedestals helps a rented prop get into character, become more convincing, and perhaps even more visible in its new role as an artwork.

By using the podium is it to show - and to emphasize - the act of exhibit itself? What this imply?

As I said, the pedestal is a framing device. Each pedestal reinforces the exhibition context, which is also a framing device. I make work for various platforms: the art context, the boutique, the Internet, etc. I'm often thinking about how these platforms function to frame my work in different ways, and how I can best guide the way in which my work is understood. Ultimately, no matter where or how it's presented, the viewer decides how he or she wants to see the work—I've designed the Freeway Eyewear sunglasses frames to hopefully provide a bit of assistance.

What do you think about what Barthes said: «Whatever

is sense: these are not things that counts, but the place of the things.»?

When installing work, and when selecting what things to put together for an installation, imagining the relationship between or among them is key to my decision-making process.

What are the images you are using for *Abbot Kinney Mural* [2012]? Could you please talk about the references to Marcel Duchamp's *Tu M'* [1918]?

In college I worked at the Yale University Art Gallery, which owns Duchamp's iconic work *Tu M'*. I was always taken by the way the work seems to describe the history and act of western picture-making in one fell swoop. I love the illusion of the painted tromp l'oeil shadows which look real, so I included



tromp l'oeil palm tree shadows in the mural. I love the fake tear in the painting, so I included a fake hole on the building's facade. I referenced the color chart, the sign-painter-painted hand, and the wavy line of the *Standard Stoppages* (in the curling ocean wave and the wavy line of the sunglass frames). I added a figure to my mural, which provided an opportunity to repeat the sunglass motif (as the stoppages repeat in *Tu M'*), but also as a way of to bring another author into the mix. The model for the figure is a friend, an actress named Casey Labow, who lives in Venice Beach. Casey knows everybody in the neighborhood, and my decision to include her in the piece was a strategy to garner local community support for the project.

Could you please talk

about your show and the objects you choose to exhibit at the Museo Civico Diocesano di Santa Maria dei Servi, in the Umbrian town of Citta' della Pieve?

The show provided the incredible opportunity to produce an installation in a Baroque church that houses a monumental Perugino fresco. I decided to continue the *Property* project in Umbria, using props rented from Cinecittà, the movie studio in nearby Rome. *Flats* placed in key alcoves provided unexpected frames for looming figurative prop sculptures, and additional freestanding flats served a similar function. The fiberglass and Styrofoam prop antiquities blended in, in some cases quite seamlessly, with the authentic white plaster moldings, carvings and figurative sculptural detail of the church.

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