

*There are many myths around you. Your father wrote that you were conceived on a boat, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Born on the island of Barbados, you spent the biggest part of your life in tropical countries; in Ghana, Hawaii... and you now live in Bali since 1993. Your grandfather was a watercolor painter... Did these events have an influence on your life?*

They cannot help but influence my life. We never lived anywhere longer than two years until I was 12 when we moved to Hawai'i, so in many ways I was always an outsider. This was certainly the case racially as my brother and I often found ourselves the only white kids in any school we were enrolled in. This continual movement through cultures and continually changing cast of faces gave me a very fluid and relativistic view of humanity and the world. My Granddad had little influence over me, he was a sweet, but rather conventional British gentleman who took up weekend Plein Air painting in his later years. The radicalism in the family started with my parent's generation. My Dad studied James Joyce at Cambridge, and my mother was a free spirited actress of some underground repute. They met in Spain and went on together to become the only foreign professional Flamenco dance team operating on the Mediterranean circuit. Their best friend was a Hollywood stuntman turned bullfighter named Ramsey Williams who fought under the name 'El Americano'. Their politics were extremely progressive and it was my Dad's decision, as a field researcher in Creole and Pidgin languages that us kids would only go to local schools, never the international schools that usually hosted expat children. I clearly remember my parent's regular and wild parties during the swinging sixties in the Caribbean and West Africa. They were always full of animated dancing and boisterous drinking, the crowd very local and often quite militant, many sporting afros, Dashekis and bellbottoms, power fists pumping the air over the Dancehall, Dub, and Reggae music.

*Why did you decide to study at Cal Arts, and then go to New York where you first worked for Jack Goldstein?*

Back then when I graduated in 1982, staying in Los Angeles was the exception not the rule. CalArts seemed to have been set up as a conduit for funneling talent straight into the New York Machine. There was already an established coterie of CalArts graduates making quite a bit of noise over there. This was a group that included Jack Goldstein, David Salle, Ross Bleckner, James Welling, and Eric Fischl that later became widely known as the CalArts Mafia. Times have changed and Los Angeles now rivals New York as a mecca for

artists, so obviously many of the newly graduated are choosing to stay.

*Who are Susie and Bob?*

The very first artwork that I completed after arriving in New York was a very simply painted word 'SUSIE' in rather absurd black Neon font on a plain white painted sheet of Masonite. I was riffing of Frank Stella's early black pinstripe paintings that set up a very simple oppositional binary, 'form defines content, content defines form.' It was also a nod to my former teacher Sherrie Levine's series where she cut generic advertising images of women into the shapes of famous American presidents. I picked the name Susie because it was it was a female first name made casual. It was for me the precise opposite the patrilineally inherited surname, (and ultimately brand), 'PICASSO'. This piece opened up so many doors of inquiry. BOB was a follow up. Realizing that then plastic armature of the letters could carry more information than the word they were conveying; I decided to push the issue. BOB was almost just a meaningless sound, while the font that spelled it out became more elaborate and ridiculous and loaded with useless cul-de-sac information. These works led directly to the non-word words, essentially just guttural sounds like UEH and GUH, or what I like to refer to as the sounds of coitus and defecation.

*Your father was a linguist. Do you think the logo paintings you realized during the 80's were influenced by his activity?*

The paintings I mentioned above are a direct product of his influence. Because of his study of Creole and Pidgin languages, I grew up in a series of countries where I ended up speaking several dialects of English, each in it's thickest and purest form completely unintelligible to the next. This gives one a very elastic view of language, and an equally elastic and slippery view of the meanings that it could generate.

*These logos works have a complex materiality. And there are drawings on the back. What was the idea behind their creation?*

The original logo work I made in 1986 consisted of the logos of the products used in the making of the piece, ie Xacto (blades), 3M (masking tape), and Liquitex (acrylic paint). It ties directly back to the SUSIE work and also 'Form defines content, content defines form'

proposition that Frank Stella offered up. There is another important aspect to the logo works. They come directly out of my experience growing up as a surfer. While I have always been loathe to make so called 'surf art', I have long been fascinated by surf culture, and considered it my own private cultural laboratory. I had started surfing seriously in Hawaii in the 70's, a time when surfboards morphed from being festooned with airbrushes mandalas and various other psychedelic clap trap to becoming completely minimal, sometimes only the plain white of uncolored fiberglass on unpainted foam. Then sometime in the 80's the once white boards started blossoming with corporate sponsorship logos. I was horrified and fascinated. It was clear that every desirable and cache offering surface in the larger culture was being colonized by this new fungal growth. I jokingly thought how something like the sides of Donald Judd's boxes would offer some of the most glamorous surface and context that branding could wish for, and that's how these works came to be.

*You discovered surfing in Ghana, years before going to Hawaii, and it changed your life. Do you consider surfing as an art? Something that is necessary to your creativity?*

It's not so much that I discovered surfing in Ghana, but rather that was my first real exposure to it. Well, at least a form of it. Every weekend, my family would head to Biruwa Beach where my parents would meet friends to hang out and drink beer in the palm frond beach shacks, while us kids rented crude hand carved wooden boards to spend the day rushing toward the sand on the reform waves that crashed just inshore of the barrier reef. I did not try proper stand up surfing until I moved to Hawaii at the age of 12. We literally could not wait, so the second day after our arrival we piled in a borrowed car and headed straight to Waikiki where we rented giant orange boards and paddled out with our local beach boy instructor under the hot summer sun to the gentle waves of the Famous Surfrider beach. We were smitten, and both my brother and I have not wavered in our dedication in 48 years of continual wave riding. This was a time before sunblock and we were fresh over from England. Needless to say, we were burned to a crisp after that wondrous day. We spent the better part of a week in bed, unable to walk with sunburn so severe our systems were poisoned. Fast forward a few decades and my relationship with both the waves and the ocean that generates them has only deepened. I have never really been attracted to the purely athletic aspects of it, but see it all in quasi-mystical terms that might be the closest I come to any real

religion. Possibly the most profound aspect is the Zen-like meditative phenomena of sitting alone out there bobbing in the undulating sea, eyes fixated on an empty horizon, waiting and watching. Splashing around on a plastic toy performing flashy acrobatics has never held much appeal, but the dance aspect, a tight and flowing Tango with the wave's uncoiling energy will always hold allure. But most of all, there is the tube. I tend to separate my life as an artist and my life as a surfer as much as possible, and the idea of doing 'Surf Art' is about as abhorrent an idea as I can conjure. It's about as lame as Golf Art, or Tennis Art. The funny thing is, after a lifetime of trying to avoid surf art per se, I now realize that oceanic themes, textures and colors have long been central to my work. The ocean seeped in even while I was consciously trying to keep it out.

*Did you choose to go to Bali because of surfing?*

I did not choose Bali specifically for surfing, but the fact that it had some of the best surf on the planet certainly didn't hurt. I actually first tried to live in Bahia, Brazil when I first left New York, and the surf there is certainly less than optimal, if you can call it surf at all. I chose Bali when Brazil did not work out. I had been going there for years by that point, and I knew that it did not have the same logistical and infrastructure problems that made trying to work and ship artworks from Bahia so deeply frustrating. It was also almost precisely on the antipodean spot on the globe to New York, and I liked the idea that I really could not get any further away. My family growing up had always been both peripatetic and tropical, and so a move to a far away place in the warm latitude was a naturally default decision.

*I did not know your work Ash's atoll, from 1993... This is a very special work, isn't it?*

That work was born of a period of great personal pain. It is probably the most autobiographical work I have ever made. For that reason it remains a very important work for me personally. Which reminds me, I think I have it in storage in New York, will need to check, because if I do, I will definitely ship it to my home in Los Angeles. I don't keep any art here in Bali as the heat and humidity tends to destroy things both quickly and efficiently.

*During the 90's you did some really realistic paintings. I think they announce your future works.*

Basically I was fed up with New York at that time and really wanted to get out. I was tired of working with and being at the mercy of fabricators, their mercurial whims and their frustrating schedules. That type of work also left me feeling alienated from the studio process itself. I wanted to dive in deep and wrestle work with my own hands, on my own time. I had always drawn and painted and felt defiant that I was not going to let the art world corral and label me. I wanted badly to exercise the full range of my voice. The problem was that I knew I would have to get out of the city if I were ever going to find the time to make the immersive and labor intensive painting that I had percolating in my head. It was ironic when I had my first exhibition of these works in 1996 that almost everyone thought that the bizarre subject matter had been influenced by the crazy island I had run off to. Nothing could have been further from the truth, that entire exhibition had been conceived and clearly visualized while I was still in New York. It was a product of the city itself, it only needed a quiet far-flung place to be physically realized.

*You said, I don't believe in truth, I believe in drama. What do you mean?*

As I have stated in a couple of previous answers, my upbringing gave me a very fluid understanding of truth. Meaning is always slippery and elastic. Now I must say here that I am a staunch believer in empirical scientific truth that hews tightly to the contours of known reality. What I was referring to in that quote was how we collectively frame and construct realities, and the most compelling definition of reality at any given moment is the one that takes root and then grows according to its own internal logic. After the disastrous and shambolic Trump presidency, itself riddled with drama over truth, I think this quote needs to be seen specifically in the larger historical context it was made for.

*There is a myth concerning Bali: during the 30's, Balinese women went topless because of the Hindu tradition. That's why many photographers came there. Of course it changed, but there is a little bit of this « sexual paradise lost feeling » in your works, no?*

My intentions in the work are far less libidinally driven that you might be interpreting here. If anything the take is an acute manifestation of high Post-Modern irony. The series of work you are referring to I call 'Junk Anthropoogy'. I am much more in discussion with the tropes of colonialism, Orientalism, Romanticism, and exoticization than I am in dialogue with my own sexual needs. I don't make paintings of things,

I make painting like things. Gauguin and others painted images of native maidens in Earthly idylls, I merely use that historic archetype as a starting point, generic filler in an ongoing inexorable question, what is this painting thing? I could care less if the women depicted in the paintings are genetically born that way or are transgender, because I am not depicting women per se, I am depicting the theater of 'woman'.

*Who is this blue man that appears in some of your works?*

He is a parody of the great male antihero that steered so much of the Western literary canon for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. I see him as an escapee suddenly washed up in an alien 21<sup>st</sup> century, and anachronism trying to hold on to his centrality in his grand existential drama, but ending up only a maudlin and comical character. He is Gauguin and Jackson Pollock, and he is Hemmingway and Somerset Maugham, and I suppose he is mocking my own delusions me too.

*Do you feel integrated to the Indonesian art world?*

After more than a quarter century living here, I just had the first ever article come out by a brilliant young Indonesian writer who made a solid argument for my contextualization as a figure in the Indonesian art world firmament. This thrilled me as no one has attempted to frame anything like it before. Truthfully, besides absolutely loving Indonesian traditional culture, I haven't made much of a conscious effort to insinuate myself into the contemporary art scene here. But over the years, it has been a very organic process of building friendships and sharing support with many of my fellow artists. It is a vibrant scene with a clearly great future, and I am thrilled to be here in this part of the world at this particular juncture.

*What is the meaning of your shark sculptures ? Are they linked to your earlier seascape works?*

My shark sculptures are actually quite simple in their intention. From the beginning my work can be divided into two distinct and opposing strains. The first is defined by the purpose driven, programmatic, and almost cartographic need to lay something out, to make a point, or to define a territory. I have often called the work of this type, 'Cuturescapes'. The second strain is much more poetic, I operate in far less defined crepuscular space, using the logic and the clarity set up by the other strain as a spring board, this second strain is reactive

and emotional. The sharks definitely fall into this latter category. I first got the idea on a years long journey I took through the Pacific many years ago. It was on an outer atoll of the Solomon Island group that I started collecting indigenous and vernacular artworks in earnest. It was very clear that so-called 'primitive' art was nothing of the sort. Art does not get better over time; it has crescendos and valleys and continually recycles. It was on this atoll that I came across a stunning life size carving of a shark. I was so taken by it that I immediately set about trying to negotiate buying it. Thank goodness they would not sell it as they felt it was an important part of their patrimony. But nevertheless, it got me going, and I realized I wanted to do one too. The carved shark was a work of very specific religious, ritualistic, and cultural import to the people of the island, and it was exactly the fact that mine could never be that that fiercely drove me to find out what indeed it would be in relation to my role as a contemporary artist and the culture it would be becoming a part of.

*How could we define your works? Photography? Painting? Sculpture?*

To my earlier point, 'painting like things' covers it. I don't much care for painting, sculpture, or photography in and of themselves, but I become intoxicated in the admixture of the three.

*A long time ago, you discovered a stone wall in Mexico and began to do some stone paintings. You still do these kinds of works. A few days ago, you sent me images of a new work, which structure reminds me of your 80's works. The art you are making in Bali is very different, but there is a real « permanence » and formal coherence between the 80's and the present days, no?*

I like to think that for all the stylistic infidelity and dramatic variation that my work has manifest over the decades, the inner logic, intentions and machinations have remained unbendingly constant. In the last three years or so I have labored to bring the work full circle so that works from vividly different periods now feel natural when juxtaposed with one another, rather than like a poorly curated group show. Truthfully, it has been difficult to make work in Bali that grew organically out of the scene that was New York City in that time, it's like swimming upstream through the rapids. And conversely, if I tried to make some of the baroque monstrosities that have come out of my Bali studio in New York, it would prove near impossible. Think of planting a coconut tree in Central Park, it simply would not grow. Art is like that, things come naturally out of certain contexts,

and prove a real struggle in others. Always good to follow the 'fall line' and gravity when one can.

*Can you tell us a few words about this work? When I saw it I thought about the pollution in Bali, especially the rivers and the Kuta beaches.*

This work is an example of what I refer to as my Flotsam series. The flotsam, or ocean borne detritus, is laid out in the vestigial formations of the waves that might have washed them onto the shore as the tide receded. I first got the idea a couple of years back when my wife and I went down to the beach at the base of the cliffs just near my house. When we arrived in the middle of the day it was high tide and the waves were smashing up against the base of the cliffs in many places. Throughout the afternoon the tide receded and as I sat there lost in the reverie of the moment, I suddenly saw it all around me. It was certainly a Eureka moment. All up and down the beach as the tide had ebbed, each receding wave had left long undulating lines of both organic and human made detritus. It said everything I wanted to say and I knew I could run with it. The question then became, run where?

As far as the reference to pollution goes, I really don't like to think of myself as an environmentalist. As an environmentalist, one one must labor under the illusion that one is saving the planet. This idea is of course absurd; we are only struggling to maintain our niche and the planet's ability to support us as a species. We cannot destroy the planet. It is ever resilient and adaptive, far bigger than us, and ultimately will just shake us off as so many fleas."

*Three years ago, Damien Hirst organized your retrospective in his Newport Gallery in London. Do you feel a proximity with Hirst and the Young British artist 's generation?*

The media has cemented me in historically with a certain group of artists in a very geographically specific time frame. Sometimes it's journalistic laziness under the onslaught of an ever-morphing landscape, but it has always felt stifling and has long been a source of personal rancor. The truth is always far more complex than these easily constructed cartoons, and the reality on the ground in New York did not always reflect these officially canonized roles we were saddled with. I am somewhat younger than most all that group I have been traditionally lumped with and never felt any meaningful shared cohesion beyond the happenstance. I was far closer temperamentally



and socially to the following generation that included the likes of Mark Dion, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Matthew Barney in New York, and the YBA's in London.