

I've known Ashley Bickerton for nearly thirty-years and though we met in New York, we both spent a lot of our youth in Hawaii - he was as a local boy there and while I grew up in Los Angeles, my family was from Oahu and Maui and I would spend summers and winter with my Grandparents. In New York, in the heyday of the late 80s/early 90s art world, Ashley was always a figure who stood out – adorned with Mexican beads and weathered felt hat, sporting Hawaiian print shirts over black Gap t-shirts, shorts, and Dr. Marten boots – cruising his Range Rover, of course with surfboard racks, to art openings - a mixture of signifiers and codes that didn't quite add up. At the parties for his own shows, he'd often jump behind the bar to serve his guests and be the first one out on the dance floor (albeit his first move being to pop and lock to whatever tune was blasting) and his art also seemed borne of these contradictions and complexities. Over the Christmas holidays in Hawaii, Ashley and our families met up several times to go to the beach and eat "kau kau", and it seems only logical that this interview took place at his parent's house on the North Shore while our wives drove to see the waves at Pipeline and my son and Ashley's youngest boy played chess downstairs.

RB: I wanted to talk about the "Fab Four" show at Sonnabend in 1986 that included you, Jeff Koons, Peter Halley, Meyer Vaisman. I was curious about how that came about.

There were several trajectories going on like fusillades being launched simultaneously from various parts of town – the first one being Neo-Exs who sort of lit up the eighties – Schnabel, Salle, Fischl, et al. which was countered and balanced by the Pictures people. Then slightly later the scene shifted to all the little East Village galleries that were opening up all over the neighborhood. The next fusillade launched came in the form of graffiti and street influenced work, which in no time shot the likes of Basquiat, Haring, and Scharf, et. into the art world stratosphere. Centered around decidedly playful galleries like Patti Astor's Fun Gallery, we saw ourselves very clearly as a 'serious' and vital counter force to that which was quickly defining the entire image of that early East Village scene. Our moment would come a few years later in the second half of the 80's. We aligned ourselves philosophically and temperamentally with the Pictures group – it was a distinct hot versus cool – Now all these years later some of the oppositional binaries that were set up seem quite comical at this point, and when I look back, a lot of the artists that I supposedly was allied with no longer appeal to me, whereas some of the artists that I was supposedly aligned against I find very appealing indeed. But the thing is we were young and there were cultural battles to be fought, and so we fought. One ironic aspect of the situation was that while I was very much part of the scene socially and was good friends with many of the key players, I had never actually been included in a show in the East Village, try as I might.

The scene was eventually picked up by the larger galleries of Soho , and even though my work had never been included in an East Village exhibition, suddenly I was one of the artists selected to represent the East Village in this more lofty arena. It was an interesting life lesson: It made me realize that because you're madly knocking on a

door on the 8th floor and not being let in doesn't mean they won't let you in on the 35th floor. There were four main galleries – Metro Pictures, Mary Boone, John Weber, and Sonnabend - making a play to do the first high profile, 'on Broadway' if you will exhibition of this new young work, with each gallery building their grand debut shows around slightly different constellations of artists. Meyer Vaisman who was the founder and director of International With Monument, the young maverick gallery that had given Koons, Halley, Richard Prince, and later myself early and it turned out, seminal shows, was quite the operator back then, so being more studio oriented, I gladly ceded a lot of the control to him. As a result, he naturally preferred the gallery that would be including him in the roster. Fortunately his first choice happened to be mine, and that's how we all ended up at Sonnabend Gallery. It was a lot to do with Meyer's involvement that after much pulls and pushes and tugs of war, this particular four person constellation came to be the group show that launched our East Village into the larger world

RB: I would say you had a pretty intense relationship with Ileana. Can you talk about her?

Mommy! (Ashley and Roddy laugh). I have had a few art mother figures in my time. One would have been Clarissa Dalrymple who was a very important person in my formation, and another of course, would have been Ileana Sonnabend. Ileana was a highly subtle, yet incredibly powerful force of nature who could with the most unperceivable of glances send shockwaves through any situation. Just one micro emotion directed from those kindly old watery eyes as she stood there, all four foot eleven of her, clad in her frumpy grey smock and matching little grey wig could send the fear of God rattling through your skeleton. Yet she remains perhaps the kindest person I have ever met. I had several offers back then from some quite appealing high profile galleries to join their rosters. As one can imagine for an artist in their mid-twenties, this was a terrifying decision that could affect ones entire life, so I wrestled with it for a long time. Ultimately how I made my decision was quite simple. I envisioned a hypothetical situation five or ten years down the line where if I decided that where I needed to go as an artist was to take a crap in the corner of the gallery, put a brass plaque above it and then ask for a big celebratory dinner to be organized in its honor, which dealer would allow me to do that? There was only one answer, and that was Ileana. That kind of nurturing and level of permission was incredibly appealing to a young artist still in the throes of forming themselves, not knowing where they were going or where they were going to end up.

RB: There are some things about your work I wanted to bring up that have rarely been discussed. For instance, the relationship to identity. The moment that we met in the late 80s/early 90s, you would never been part of the identity politics discourse or at least on the fringe, perhaps because you couldn't be fit into an easy digestible category. But identity seems to be an ongoing dominant theme throughout the work.

It is never going to be seen like that. I'll never be seen as a painter because I don't fit certain prescribed parameters of acceptable definitions of what a painter is. What the hell have I been doing all along? All my pieces with logos and electronic counters on them? They were specifically addressing painting! But I couldn't really talk about painting by doing something that looked like traditional painting. So when you ask me about the identity politics movement, again, it's the same thing. I've not been considered in this category precisely because of the prescribed dictates of this movement – native Hawaiians must speak for native Hawaiians, etc. but my case is a little odd. I've grown up in a series of countries, and we never lived anywhere longer than two years at a time, where I was always in a distinct racial minority. As the son of a Professor and field researcher of linguistics, specializing in Creole Pidgin languages, we started our global peripatetic existence living in the stragglings scraps of what was once the British Empire but by then were then fast becoming often times militant hot beds of nascent nationalism. When I was at school in Ghana as a six and seven year old, my brother and I were the only white kids there and were universally referred to as the "Moon Face brothers". When we moved to America, we didn't move to Wisconsin or Milwaukee, we moved to Hawaii where I was a "haole". And as an adult, except for the time I spent in New York, I have chosen to live in Indonesia where I'm again the other, the outsider. Clearly I'm not seeking any special understanding, but I grew up as a recipient of all of that information, and my understanding of race is definitely not the American norm. So yes, a lot of my work has addressed this, often in ironic ways, often through parody. What do constructs of race mean, and who is allowed to address them? Later I brought this thinking to bear on ideas of gender and sexuality as well? There are always some people (usually Caucasian) who have misunderstood my later work and considered it racially insensitive or dangerous as far as gender understanding and politics go. To this I always answer, "If it's dangerous, that's exactly the reason why I want to go there." I like danger and have always felt confident that my experience and sensitivity would allow me to ride the many knife-edges this territory invariably throws up. Some clearly might disagree and that's fine, but as we've all noted, the greatest enemy of the extreme left is always the slight less doctrinaire and ideologically pure, never the extreme right.

RB: The discourse around identity became quickly inclusive and exclusive at the same time, but the complexities of the construction of identity needs a more complex exploration.

That's been terribly important. Cultural constructions of gender and of race, as opposed to naked human biomass, and of social identity in general are only properly realized through the structuring of common cultural language – and by that I don't mean just spoken or written language – I am referring to the whole complex range that codified cultural communication that is continuously broken down or toyed with in my work. Somebody once asked me about my representation of women, and my response is always "Who says they're women?" I'm not interested in portraying sex per se. I'm interested in gender. The cultural theater of sexuality is what interests me.

RB: You've also straddled modes of representation and you've talked about how you wanted your paintings to function as sculptures and the sculptures to function as paintings or the landscapes to function as portraiture. You're constantly crossing signals.

That's been precisely the source some of the resistance to my work, what do you represent? I've now had five museum turn down or drop one person retrospectives or surveys because they couldn't make it past the museums boards. It's taken this show here at the Newport Street Gallery to actually give me the breakthrough that I've been waiting all these years for. The unique aspect of the Newport Street is that it has a board of one, just Damien. All those crisscrossed codes and signals that are intentional in the work can end up being confusing, and people don't know where they stand, or even where I stand in relation to it all. When I was being locked and loaded, and imprisoned, as a Neo Geo artist was precisely the moment I decided to just bugger off and leave the art world. There is a strong resistance to any sort of categorization, compartmentalizing, or even any particular reading of the work. As artists, we're continually stymied, continually limited in our ability to speak by the dictates of market and fashion. One feels the inexorable push to produce mute tasteful décor with the correct degree of a nod to conceptual underpinnings that can be readily consumed by corporate culture and the like minded. It's unthreatening, it lacks voice. And I feel very strongly that this is not fair for art. Why should we be limited like that? If I have a wild drug fueled bender and end embroiled in a mad three-day love affair on Hydra or some Mediterranean island, or if have some harrowing life changing experience in the neon lit back alleys of late night Vientiane, I want to be able address that with the full force of my oeuvre. Another more pressing example would be the travesty of an election like the one we just experienced in the U.S. I need to be free to discuss that, however obliquely, directly through my work. This led to a strong feeling, "What is really the point of inventing an new artistic language if that language is not going to be applied to discuss, critique, and analyze the larger world? If that language just wallows in the stew of its own construction, if it manages only to be this self-referential thing sitting there on a wall, then for me, it is a totally uninteresting outcome for art. You invent a new language so that new language can be applied to the world. And that's when it becomes meaningful. That has been the central push of my work from the beginning.

RB: Another thing that has rarely been talked about is the humor in the work.

It took years for me to realize that all my work has always been about parody in some way. And it's not binary construction of parody; it's always multi-directional all at once, as often as not, cutting back on or undermining the very premises that it's setting up. I love playing all sorts of angles with meaning, playing havoc with belief systems, pro and con, being both irrelevant and awestruck in one breath, but always parodistic in nature. At the same time that this internal dialogue is going on with 'content', there is always the overriding parody of what that art object even is, the pretensions of that object, of its aspirations as an individual thing in the larger

cultural frame, ripped apart and turned it inside out. One of the best descriptions I've heard regarding this approach was a quip that Ron Jones made when we were hanging out one night, "The funny thing about your work is that when you're dead serious, that's precisely when you're not, and when you're joking around, that's when you're dead serious."

RB: I always wonder if people can't read irony in art.

There's so much art being produced today, and particularly with all the hectic art fair driven machinery in place. People just don't have time to look that closely unless of course you're lucky enough to be one of those artists enjoy that rarified and exalted status where a million scholars are looking at every angle of your work, shining flashlights into every dark crevice. It seems today that if you suddenly shift your identity, you just get swallowed up in the storm of artists coming up behind and from all sides on every conceivable type of social media platform. Shape shifting of the kind David Bowie managed can still be done, but it is extremely difficult in an art world that is so much more broad, populous, and inclusive than ever before. 40,000 kids a year were graduating from art school when I was there and it can only have doubled by now. I can only imagine what the numbers are. That's an awful lot of kids with serious higher education in high art being poured out into the broader population, all their dreams and ambitions, all screaming to make their voices unique and heard above the fray.

[Roddy's phone beeps] Sorry, We got a text. Cherry says "Roddy, please tell Ash the surf is tiny"

RB: Let's talk about the Newport show and your friendship with Damien. When we all first met over twenty-five years ago, I remember how much we talked about the power of art and how much we believed in it. It's astonishing how Damien has collected work from every incarnation that you have had, borderline obsessively, but he only seems to collect work he loves and there's also been an ongoing dialog between the two of you as artists. I can see your canister piece filled with different objects and colorful materials relating to the spot Paintings, the beachcomber flotsam pieces resemble his pill cabinets, both your interests in logos as design and branding, your boxes and his vitrines.

Let me start by saying putting together this show is easily the most enjoyable period I have had as an artist. I'm doing this strange dance of love with this hell-bent madman who keeps challenging me and throwing me bait and all I've got to do is reach as far as I can (Roddy and Ashley laugh). It's been pure pleasure, the whole thing. As you said, he's borderline compulsive but his passion is unequalled in any human being I've ever seen in my life. If I write down an idea and send it to him, I'd probably not even get an email reply, but if I put an idea together using images that incorporate color and visual allure, I can guarantee no matter what time of day it is, I get a text or an email in less than a minute. "I luv it" or "I want it". Usually his "love" contains about fifteen 'O's and ten exclamation points. And then sometimes there'll

be a 2nd cooler reply after awhile, "Well, maybe not this one." (Roddy and Ashley laugh).

RB: I remember when you had a show opening at Sonnabend in New York and Damien had an opening at the same time, maybe his first one at Gagosian.

Yes it was his initial downtown show at Gagosian, I think in 1996.

RB: I was thinking about that piece you made with the perfect set of waves in that show.

"Waves Generated a Thousand Miles Away by Damien Hirst Breaking on a Reef in My Head" was an idea born from my two lives as both a surfer and an artist. The premise was that the waves that surfers seek often travel great distances from the storms that generate them to get to the place where they are ridden, the further the distance from the originating storm, the more groomed those waves become. A great oceanic storm deep in the Southern hemisphere or conversely off the Aleutian Islands up in the northern extremes of the Pacific will produce a swell train that travels thousands of miles, all the while lining up, organizing, sorting itself out so what had started off as an anarchic maelstrom, would, over the course of its open ocean journey, transform itself into evenly groomed waves that broke with mechanical precision down the skirt of a submerged reef in Hawaii. It was this idea, first a surfer's idea, but also one that as a metaphor, artists can feed off other artists as well. I thought whatever the heck Damien was doing in London at the time at the height of his wild and wayward ways, was like a great oceanic storm. I didn't know exactly what Damien was up to but I could feel it. What had started as a drug fueled blizzard of debauchery in the bowels of the Groucho Club in London or wherever they hung out was being transformed over distance into something else, something quite elegant and whatever energy he was putting out was organizing itself into well groomed wave trains that were breaking mechanically down a reef in my skull. That brutalism had been transformed into something quite elegant, maybe even dainty. The third idea here is that we pick up things through osmosis. There have been fascinating studies where it has been proven that monkeys on three separate islands that have no connection whatsoever, islands with significant distance and currents between them, will pick up the usage of a new tool while foraging on one island and suddenly maybe a season or two later, it'll appear on the next island though there was no possibility of communication as we recognize it. I do believe in osmosis as a little understood part of our collective psychic make up. Traditional tribal people have long been recorded as able to locate scattered members of their tribe over vast distances through 'dream wanderers' and 'spirit animals' that appear to them in dreams.

RB: Some of the pieces you've done around booze or surfing - this idea of teleportation, and transportation or freezing a moment - is art is about that too?

One of my favorite words in relation to art comes from a rather unlikely source. In an interview I once heard Reba McEntire used the word “transport” when describing some piece of music or other. It immediately hit me, “that’s it.” “Transport”, that’s what art is - to move you from one place to another, physically, emotionally, mentally, intellectually, or otherwise. That’s an essential and deceptively simple word for all art making, whether you’re looking at a Milton Avery landscape or listening to the breathless riffs of Django Reinhardt.

[Roddy’s son, Kaleo, calls out from below asking if he and Ashley’s son Kamahale and go in the pool]

RB: (to Kaleo) We’re working.

Kaleo: It’s really nice Dad.

Just let them.

RB: Okay go ahead (to Kaleo). Speaking of osmosis, we should talk about the sharks. Damien talks about his sharks as confronting death or confronting fear and your shark pieces are cast out of resin or rubber with modified fin lengths you’ve done and not real sharks. What do the hammerheads mean to you?

I don’t know what I’m going to see with this Newport show, my career and production have been so defined by restlessness, but there is one thing of which I am certain, with this first time large scale gathering of works across several decades, I will meet myself as an artist for the first time. Hoping that the experience will not be a letdown. The one thing that has become clear in putting this show together is a continual preponderance of marine references. That seems to be a theme throughout the work as much as light was a theme for Turner, or marine nocturnes a continually reoccurring psychological theme in the work of Albert Pinkham Ryder. You’re going to see marine references whether the work is abstract or not, or whether or not it’s even a central them of the work. The shark is an odd one that you’d have to pair it with the Manta Ray piece. My work in more than one way has always had a bi-furcated trajectory – some works are almost didactic in their desire to make a very clear pronouncement about their being, about their direction or intention, and conversely there’s a whole other body of work that I keep flipping back to that is much more poetic, much more undirected, which is “I don’t know what it means? I can’t explain it.” I don’t really want to explain it. I just know that they are poetic constructions of some sort that create their own dialog. The overriding intent in this type of work is the idea that what is the point of inventing some new artistic language if that language is only going to refer to itself? That language must be applied to the larger world. The first idea for the shark came when I was traveling through the eastern Solomon Islands, one of the most remote areas of this island nation. It was on a tiny atoll named Santa Ana, the most easterly speck in this South Pacific archipelago, that I first seriously developed the bug to start collecting traditional artifacts. I hadn’t at that point ever collected my

contemporaries like so many of my artist friends were doing in trading work with one another. My slow and cumbersome production made trading difficult, as well as a great source of frustration. It was there on Santa Ana that I realized there was this other way that I could balance that big hole in my life. It was clear that traditional artifacts had all the power, all the complexity of language, and all the physical beauty of contemporary art, so I started collecting it like a madman. When I got this first batch back to New York, I would study them for hours thinking about what they meant in the context of which they were made, and how they operated within that cultural framework in describing their reality, their religion, their place in ritual, all of that, which I realized was essentially precisely how objects in contemporary art work for us.

The sharks and mantas were some of the first, and still to this day some of the only pure sculptures that I have done. Unlike so much of my work, I don't consider them inverted paintings or in any way addressing what a painting is. I've only done a few pure sculptures and a lot of them were in that '93 Sonnabend show. What I was trying to do with that body of work was to use sculptural form to create a travelogue, but not a travelogue as document of a journey through any real Pacific, I was trying to document traveling through a fictional Pacific of my mind, maybe somewhat like Rousseau traveling through a never seen jungle of his mind. That was how the sharks came about and I'm still not sure what I was doing and I'm not sure I care to find out. I know I was hijacking the shark's manna, both talismanic as well as primal, but more than that, why should I understand it? Why should an artist understand their work?

[Someone calls out from the gate. The Hawaiian neighbor has brought over a plate of spring rolls for Ashley and his family]

RB: The new Wall Wall pieces that are in the last room of Newport Street are bringing back some of the elements of the original versions but they seem to be going after different goals that's more painterly than sculptural and they pop off the wall much more. They are also bringing back some of the classic Bickerton metal hardware of drilled out aluminum and steel. Once you said some of this had to do with "protecting the work" but the elements in the new pieces seem to have more to do with abstraction.

Essentially they're not that different. I first came up with the idea during an explosive moment that produced all the other strains that were to determine my trajectory for years to come. It was the mid 80's and I had, along with several other emerging artists including Haim Steinbach and Christopher Wool, just been picked up by the Cable Gallery. This is basically an idea that came into being in my mid 20's a full thirty-two years ago. The initial spark came to me on the outskirts of Acapulco after a long journey up from Oaxaca. Sitting in the back of a bus, I looked out the window and I saw this hideous purple and pink wall. It's garishness really caught my attention and I was just starting at it when suddenly that "eureka" moment flashed and I realized "there it is," the answer to so many of the questions and plays

in my head. This was considerably before the label Neo Geo was ever leveled at us, but I knew instantly that in this form was one of the answers I had been searching for in my continual asking of "What in fact is painting, and what is a painting as an anthropological thing? This off kilter clue made it clear that if I just constructed a slab of what was essentially an allegorical piece of wall that snapped in place on an existing blank wall, then it could dehydrate painting down to its base meaning, something that fills a space on a wall with color and form that affects. What's more obvious than a piece of colored wall? And that itself will affect the meaning and thus create the meaning. Artwork as dehydrated chicken bullion.

This latest incarnation of the Wall-Walls all came about because Damien had some old damaged or incomplete pieces that he had bought way back and I had since forgotten about. Back then we were young and moving so fast with shows and new ideas that I had a backlog pieces from several periods lying around in my studio that were either partly done, never finished, or had been finished but since broken and needing serious repair. One crazy night, we were all partying there in the studio when Damien said "What are you going to do with all those pieces?" I replied that I had no idea and didn't care, to which he unhesitatingly said, "I'll trade you for all of 'em!" I was shocked, from my perspective it was just a pile of useless rubbish, so I happily accepted and promised that one day if he ever showed them or did anything with them, that I'd fix them up. Well that day came around when this Newport show came on the boards and he sent some pieces out to me in Bali. I was suddenly faced with these all these old works that I'd ran away from so many years ago. But for many reasons the timing turned out to be perfect, as after a quarter century of rejecting and running, I found myself finally ready to embrace this work once more when I saw the pieces in the studio. It was clear that not only did I really still love them, but I was not near finished with this line of inquiry and expression, there was so still much left to say. But here's the difference, if you look at the trajectory the early rock wall pieces took toward the end, I've actually brought these new ones back close to very earliest ones. Over the several years that I made those earlier Wall-Walls, they took off in a direction that wasn't the direction I want to push them now. While the structures became more and more elaborate with adjunct information, the rocks themselves became a smaller and smaller component of a larger conceptually imagined assembly. Today I want to refocus on the wall itself, making only that the visual locus that underpins the conceptual thinking. As far as the hardware goes, I'm still working that out. When I first went back to them, I made a conscious decision to make them more painterly, but with that settled, I'm questioning exactly how the installation hardware affects the overall meaning. And now words too are sneaking back in to the work again because they've got to be what they are, if they're not calibrated and nuanced precisely, they can become just pretty things, something that fills me with dread. From the beginning I've really enjoyed stacking work up with useless cul-de-sac information, or auxiliary information that doesn't necessarily walk in alignment with the intended meaning of the piece, sometimes even moving in a counter direction. This intentionally confounding approach has often worked against me as far as a critical understanding of the work goes, but I cannot stop because it's one of the central

tenants of the work itself. Colliding, contradictory, inconclusive, and slippery meanings are at the heart of everything here.

RB: There are other new pieces in the Newport show –the life-size metallic girl with the flower wreath in the canoe holding a hammerhead, the new fat body roped onto the rusted Vespa scooter.

I've always longed to re-visit the fat body. I would have loved to have made more and experimented with colors, but I lost the original sculptural mold somewhere along the way when I was going through some pretty turbulent times, houses and studios moved, leaving for Brazil and then Indonesia. It wasn't until now, years later, that that chance came. Once again, it gets back to this strange and crazy dance that I've been doing with Damien where he's afforded me the opportunity to do a lot of things that I've wanted to do as an artist for a long time. Through him, I've had the ability to actually go about realizing some of these things, and I particularly wanted to pay another visit to that piece. Before this, I had actually re-visited it in a photographic painting with a fat blue guy on a moped, so in a way I was tying the them all together – the original fat body, the blue man, and the Vespa that is a continually re-occurring motif in a lot of the work. Not sure why, but it is. I neither ride, nor even particularly like motorbikes. Something about a Vespa though seems to represent a kind of nonchalant and easy freedom. I don't know, I guess I like them as an idea.

[The phone rings and Marina, Roddy's wife calls. She and Ashley's wife Cherry are at the beach]

Quick we should go online and see if they've quickly put up Tinder accounts. (Roddy laughs) Just to see what kind of hits they get from overabundance of surfer boys up here on this corner of the island.

RB: So the silver girl in the canoe is made sculptural from the paintings as well.

In the work that I've done since moving to Bali, I keep returning this one idea. When I paint the tropics, or any kind of thematically island type of life or reference, I purposefully avoid any historical or cultural veracity. What I paint is the stew of degraded tropicalia one finds in B-grade films. These are films where you might find the unlikely mix of a shirtless Tarzan like dancer shaking maracas and doing the limbo with volcanoes and tikis behind while racially ambiguous grass skirted girls ape the movements of Hula. This is an aesthetic of junk anthropologies, one where an unintelligible mix of anything that flips the switch and oozes with signifiers of the "tropical" are just thrown together into a general stew, anthropological authenticity be damned. That's the whole point. I don't want to do images of Balinese maidens replete with authenticity of cultural detail. My impetus comes as much from the cornball postcards that are sold to tourists as it does from general travel experience on a more and more homogenized planet. In these far off exotic places, nobody can be bothered to dress the part anymore outside of specialized tourist entertainment.

I could make it easy and say that in a way it's Gauguin filtered through Warhol, but that only shows part of it. Even Gauguin had to admit that the world he tried to find no longer existed and he was forced to move to the Marquesas where he discovered that even in that remote setting, it no longer existed. This noble Eden that he dreamed of had already been so corrupted that it left him no choice but to create a fiction in its place, a fiction for a very specific audience. By the time people of my generation roll around, these ideas of a human paradise have been so utterly degraded and compromised by the machinery of the dream industries, that they only exist as moribund vestiges in gas filled vitrines displayed for the check lists of touristic consumption. While these notions of perfect paradisiacal equilibrium remain pungent inducements and fantasies, they essentially cannot exist outside of memory and desire. Somebody else might try and look for the last remaining bits of unsullied Eden, but I go decidedly the other way, loading it all up in a slag heap of directive signifiers calculated to trigger Joe Blow's longing for escape.

RB: There are two new works, the Vector boxes, that have beach debris, mostly partly decomposed plastic that hasn't biodegraded, Styrofoam, bits of twigs laid out like the tidal patterns on the shore inside a mirrored box with fans blowing like some of your earlier "anthropospheres" along with aluminum handles, nylon covers protecting the box, and sealed by glass that has etchings of various river patterns and also in fact an architectural template. They are bringing in a lot of formal strands of earlier pieces.

These new Vector Boxes I'm working on for the Newport show were a very hard piece to photograph or to construct digital models of and when I first wrote Damien and suggested what I was doing, there was a "hmmm...maybe" to which I had to write three times "What do you think?" finally to get an "I don't know." So I built a small model. "Hmmm....hmmm" again. I was really convinced that these were good pieces and they had to be done and included in the show so I finally realized I had to build a life size version, a scale model of what it would look like to photograph it. So I built a scale model at one to one and built all the structure around it and then I sent an image and got the "Fuckin' luv it. Want it."

I'm actually using the exact same template that I used in the earlier "Abstrakt" piece with the architectural toilets in it that Damien owns that's also in this show. I sourced the original and I'm using it for the newer work. Damien pushed for the handles on that one, all the hardware. He likes that, it's a particular thing. As you mentioned, he's collected work from all throughout my artistic productive life but he has his favorites. He tends to like that particular period quite a lot. I'm going to continue making them as I'm really interested to see where they go like the new versions of the Wall pieces.

RB: And there's two "updated" works, a big Good/Bad painting and the "anniversary" self-portrait with logos.

Well Damien just wants to fuck the youthful beauty he used to know not the bitter old broken down menopausal sow that I've become. (Roddy and Ashley laugh) The wonderful thing about working with somebody as passionate and even more important than passion, permissive and open minded as Damien is we just get to try things and throw it out. We both really liked the "Good" and "Bad" image and were thinking of ways to do it. Again, this is an image I really didn't feel I was done with and I've never used the two in combination that is something which has always been a desire. It's actually a collaboration with a third party, the designer Stefan Sagmeister who's a dear friend and had used a design like that in my book. Stefan got the design obviously from my design and my thinking staying within the general parameters of my color ranges and referents but I liked his so much, I called him and asked him "Can we do a painting like that?" and he happily agreed and we did it. It was one of those things where you get an opportunity and you run with it like when Warhol was given the opportunity to do the shadow paintings installation for Dia. He wouldn't have come up with that idea had it not been in his dialog with Dia and giving him a situation that allowed that work to happen. The meaning is not necessarily changed drastically from a single or a double shadow painting or one hundred and four but the whole thing becomes something else and it becomes interesting for that reason.

I've suffered greatly by being put in a Neo Geo box because that was what was convenient and easy to consume while my artistic life is deep and varied and must go on. And it is my language, it belongs to me and it belongs to me forever. And if I need to say it, the rest be damned. Why should it become compartmentalized? There was a twenty-five year anniversary and there's going to be fiftieth year anniversary because the products I consume change. The nature of the piece isn't changed but before it was loaded up with lots of pre-internet, world wide web earlier things and now a lot of the contradictions I had then have transformed into other contradictions. And then my later piece, twenty-five years from now, fifty years hence from the original, will have old people's products – Metamucil, adult diapers, the Clapper, all those sort of things. And I'm quite interested to see three of them one day all shown next to each other.

[Roddy's phone rings.]

RB: Okay we'll bring the boogie board. We're just wrapping up.

Are they at Puaena?

RB: Yes, they said to come over. I've sensed that you've turned a corner and you're picking up speed. The work seems to be pulling in elements from various moments in your career, maybe moving towards some kind of synthesis.

I'm actually heading to a bukkake party as the low man on the totem pole. (Ashley and Roddy laugh)

At fifty-seven years of age, I'd run away for long enough because I hate to be trapped and I've had in a sense an oddly bi-furcated career that seems hard to follow and yet I know somewhere in there, there is one voice. And one voice that is consistent, one voice that has been saying the same thing all along and so there is a real desire right now to draw it all together with the overarching trajectory of the work itself to attempt to isolate that single voice that is a Bickerton work. It doesn't matter if it's some screaming green head or a mute box with an electronic price ticking on it. There is something running through it all and now it's time to bring it all together to find out, to see what overarching themes, what impulses, what mechanisms keep reoccurring that define the animal itself, the impetus of the work. I know that when this show opens or when I see it installed for the first time, I'm going to see an artist that I don't even know because I've moved so quickly and loosely and variously. I've jettisoned huge bodies of work, huge volumes of trajectories and have taken sharp turns in other directions out of curiosity or again that desire – one, to not be contained, to not be labeled, to not be pigeonholed, to not be typecast, to not be classified, to not be essentially describable – and the larger desire to make art speak, the languages that you've developed, to apply them to addressing the larger world. I believe this show will be big enough, expansive enough, and inclusive enough that we will finally get an idea of what the heck I'm doing. I certainly will. Can't speak for the rest of the world. So that's where we're at right now. I'm looking for the underlying motor that powers the whole thing. I'm looking for the unifying field theory if you will, the unifying impulse that makes it what it is. Because you never want to describe a work by its outward style, you always want to locate the motor. Especially when you're stealing from other artists.