

Josh Kline

47 Canal

Typically, when an art work is referred to as being ‘of the moment’, it’s meant derisively. Our romantic ideals require art to transcend culture and time, to live on eternally rather than in a fashionable present. ‘Dignity and Self Respect’, Josh Kline’s first solo exhibition in New York, unapologetically did none of this. His objects (lit by the cold glow of the kind of LEDs often seen in shop displays), photographs and videos are time capsules of this very moment, of New York, of Kline’s circle of collaborators and friends born in the mid-1970s and early ’80s. The caustic press release adeptly described his world (that of creative sector workers with multiple jobs) as fighting a losing battle, both economically and psychologically, with the city’s increasing championing of celebrity and commercial endeavours: ‘James Franco holds down 19 careers. Why can’t you?’

And, with the variety of products offered by a typical American pharmacy chain-store, why can’t we? *Sleep is for the Weak* (all works 2011) comprises three Bodum cafetières filled with Red Bull, DayQuil and Coke Zero, and ‘infused’ with Vivarin, Dentyne Ice chewing gum and Ibuprofen. Composed of mass-marketed products, this homemade yet utterly artificial combination carries a quiet threat of the next iteration of hyped consumables to come. A similar message comes with Kline’s portrayal of the millennial generation in the video *What Would Molly Do?*, which documents interviews with potential interns for Kline within a constructed set. The process takes place in front of a green screen intercut with flashes of fans or props being adjusted. Self-awareness (and any inkling of professionalism) is mostly absent here; one barely audible candidate’s only enthusiastic response is when asked if he does Molly (a term for MDMA). Perhaps these subjects can get a boost of inspiration from trying on the antibodies of the creative professionals they aspire to from *Share the Health (Assorted Probiotic Hand Gels)*, where cultures swabbed from a Uniqlo store and iPad app developers are cultivated in soap dispensers. Or they could pick up one of the silicone surrogates of *Creative Hands*, in which each cast clutches a contemporary token of its profession. From the retoucher with her Apple mouse,

About this review

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By *Lumi Tan*



Sleep is for the Weak, 2011, three cafetières filled with Red Bull, DayQuil, Coke Zero, Vivarin, Dentyne Ice chewing gum and Ibuprofen



through the studio manager with a bottle of Advil, to Kline's own hand (identified in one of his other roles, that of a curator) with Purell hand sanitizer, these creative producers are often those whose work it is to be the invisible support behind the star artist or global advertising campaign. Presented in multiple editions, these are bodies reduced to occupations, permanently wedded to their tools.

Kline exploits the relationship between our physical failings in trying to keep up with New York's 24-hour work-cycle to the product lines we create and desire – the aura of simplicity and purity as evolved through focus groups and market surveys, the perceived antidote to our daily lives. Even our celebrities now receive this cleaned-up treatment; in *Absorbing the 90s* and *Haunted Deodorant*, part of an ongoing photo series in which Kline switches pairs of celebrity eyes, their existence as images is unnervingly unreal. Both the gold standard of authenticity, Kurt Cobain, and the proudly caricatured Nicki Minaj, manage to look equally out of time and place, becoming flattened objects of our own design.

Beyond the gallery, the Occupy Wall Street movement was dominating much of the daily conversation between art workers whilst Kline's show was up; talks of union organizing, eliminating unpaid internships in commercial galleries, and artists being paid fairly for exhibitions were beginning to become an identified right rather than merely a complaint. With luck, 'Dignity and Self Respect' will become a relic of a transitional time; for now, it has been one of the sharpest mirrors of the present.

Lumi Tan

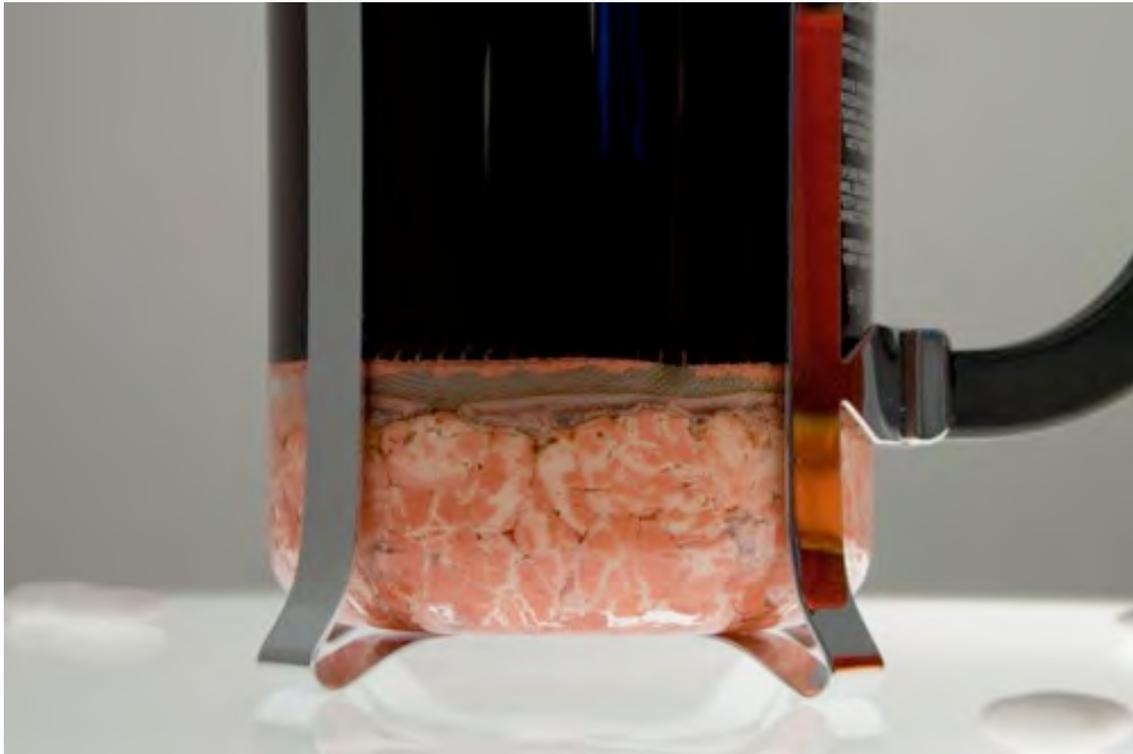
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GUEST BLOG: Amanda Beroza Friedman, Artist, Brooklyn

Interview with Artist Josh Kline

December 16th, 2011 by Amanda Beroza Friedman



Josh Kline. "Sleep is for the Weak," installation detail, 2011. Bodum French press coffee makers, Coke Zero infused with Ibuprofen (pictured), DayQuil infused with Dentyne Ice, Redbull infused with Vivarin. 43 x 36 x 11 3/4 inches.

The following interview between artist [Josh Kline](#) and I was conducted via email. We cover work, media, hands, and the end. 2012!

Amanda Beroza Friedman: For your current exhibition, *Dignity and Self-Respect*, [the press release](#) is amazing. And fatal. Is the world ending? What do the '90s have to do with it?

Josh Kline: Someone's world is always ending. That's the nature of aging and death. The teenagers and twentysomethings of the '90s, born in the '70s and early '80s, are finally moving into undeniable and irreversible adulthood. It's extremely difficult to use thirtysomethings to sell youth culture.

Unlike previous generations of artists and musicians, this generation moved into early adulthood absolutely thrilled to participate in focus groups and pose for product-placement shots in exchange for sponsored drinks, complimentary magazines, unpaid jobs, and the chance to be near some reissued retro sneakers. You spill your personal problems and innermost secrets on social media and Facebook turns it into entertainment for other people and sells advertising around it. Even after the asteroid hits the Earth, some life will go on. In this vision of the future, people will continue, but perhaps as products and services instead of as human beings.

In my show at [47 Canal](#), a lot of the work comes out of thinking about this transition, about the transformation of creative people into mass-produced or mass-distributed goods, services, or advertising. It's also about a generation in the process of being deprecated by the market as trend forecasters look to the tastes of the young people of today for this season's sounds and colorways. The youth culture of the '90s and of the 2000s are reference points for the show, but the installation's setting is today.

ABF: Your work speaks to communication strategies. Over the last few months, the occupation movement has brought back hand signals, chanting, and the general consensus model of group governing. From where you stand, how is [Occupy Wall Street](#) doing with communication?

JK: I think Occupy Wall Street is doing an incredible job with communication. Less than four months ago the entire conversation on the news was about austerity, deficit reduction, and finding more ways to transfer more money from the poor and the middle class to "job creators." I sometimes wonder if the Democratic Party and their supporters are throwing the game deliberately. The 99% and the 1% is an incredibly persuasive and effective argument.

ABF: Do you read [Adbusters](#)? Where do you get your news?

JK: I bought an issue once in the late '90s and found it forgettable.

I read the news on the Internet at my desk at work while I eat lunch. Also, I'm a podcast junky. I listen to a lot of news while I work in the studio and while I cook.

ABF: What does the creative sector mean to you? How do you define hard work?

JK: I see the creative sector as the area of the economy that encompasses creative workers: artists, designers, people in advertising, filmmakers, writers, stylists, etc. – all of the people who are making a livelihood or trying to make one generating cultural products and services. For me the idea of the creative sector has become synonymous with unpaid or underpaid precarious labor and with debt-driven aspirational lifestyles.

How do you define hard work? For some people it's thinking and worrying until your stomach hurts. For others it's working 70-90 hours a week. Or maybe it's an ideology



Josh Kline. "Creative Hands," 2011. 13 pigmented silicone hands on commercial shelving with LED lights from top to bottom, left to right: Photographer's Hand with Digital Camera (Marcelo Gomes), Studio Manager's Hand with Advil Bottle (Margaret Lee), Retoucher's Hand with Mouse (Jasmine Pasquill), DJ/Designer's Hand with iPhone (Jon Santos), Curator's Hand with Purell (Josh Kline). Overall: 36 1/2 x 26 1/8 x 15 1/2 inches.

with roots in Protestantism imported from Northern Europe? If you're an Indonesian maid working 6-7 days a week in Hong Kong who gets pushed out of a window, maybe it means something completely different.

ABF: Hands are important to a maker. What was it like to make those included in "Dignity and Self-Respect" and can you talk about the process?

JK: With the *Creative Hands*, I wanted to physically appropriate and mass-produce the hands of creative workers, of the people who actually shape our culture. They're the counterpoint to the show's lone video *What Would Molly Do?*, which presents interviews with intern candidates. Whereas in the video I'm presenting interns as subjects, with the hands I wanted to present people successful in the roles that the potential interns aspired

to reach – consultants, graphic designers, DJs, curators, studio managers, retouchers, etc. I wanted to show both ends of the commercial creative lifecycle. The hands and the objects they hold are cast in skin-colored silicone rubber – which is already a proxy for flesh. Each person is holding a tool, a piece of lifestyle technology – an iPhone, a mini-bottle of Jameson, a Blackberry, a bottle of Advil, a digital camera, etc. One hand is wearing a carpal tunnel wrist brace.

As subjects, I selected people I knew. Friends. I wanted to implicate and involve my own social network. My own hand is in there holding a bottle of Purell, representing my life as a curator and all the hands I shake. I cast my collaborator Jon Santos's hand – he's a celebrated graphic designer and well-known DJ. I cast the hands of a famous artist's studio manager (who is also an artist I collaborate with and my gallerist); of Ken Miller, the former editor of Tokion; of Cynthia Leung, the head of PR at Balenciaga; of my friend Jasmine Pasquill who retouches images for the covers of major fashion magazines. I brought them in one by one, and with some expert help from other friends (Jesse Greenberg and Margaret Lee), I cast the hands, produced molds and then proceeded to produce a series of rubber sculptures. In many cases the subjects collaborated, selecting the objects in their hand or the gesture that was captured. Ken had the idea to use a mini-bottle of Jameson and Cynthia had a very specific grip in mind for the Blackberry.

ABF: What are you most excited about in 2012?

JK: Excited is probably the wrong word, but I can't take my eyes and ears off the coverage of the Eurozone meltdown. It's a non-stop economic cliffhanger. Spring and summer are going to be interesting times.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS – Year in Review

Ryan Trecartin, “A Painting Show,” Josh Kline

Sentences exploded. The sedentary warped action. Space replaced place. In “Ryan Trecartin: Any Ever” at MoMA PS1, Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch installed sculpture, video, and music to inspire continual shifts of focus, so that everything flickered between object and ambience. It was a thrilling, wholly convincing expression of the smelting of language, self, and the world in telecom’s foundry.

I feel weird writing about painting but I love to look at it, and the best place to do that in 2011 was “A Painting Show” at Harris Lieberman. It was a constellation of conversations and influences: Elizabeth Murray’s outward-grasping canvas, Laura Owens’s thickly spotted linen, and Polly Apfelbaum’s layered crushed velvet on the floor. No big deal was made of it in the press release, but all of the painters were women.



Installation view: Dignity and Self-Respect

We have had enough art about art. But art about artists and what it means to be one feels sharp when even people without artistic aspirations thrive on their publics. Performa’s commissioned artists had plenty to say about attention and desire, but in my mind they were eclipsed by Josh Kline’s solo debut at 47 Canal. “Dignity and Self-Respect” included seamy silicone hands clutching little computers, deformed water bottles, home-brew energy drinks, and would-be interns in a video portrait of a generation vainly pursuing recognition. His is sculpture that situates your body not just in its present surroundings but in the overlapping everyday cycles of wants and deeds.

- Brain Droitcour
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