

“The Final Taboo: A conversation between Benjamin Murphy and Andy Dixon”
by Benjamin Murphy / February 17, 2019



Andy Dixon in his Los Angeles studio with *Narcissus Painting*, 2018. Photo by Trevor Brady

Andy Dixon is a Canadian artist whose creative output is as heterogeneous as it is consistent, whether painting, making music, design or running a record label.

In recent years, he has spent most of his time painting, and with this has developed his signature style of brightly-coloured portraits, interiors, and mythical scenes. His work has been shown in galleries throughout the world, and his next exhibition ‘Look at This Stuff Isn’t It Neat’ opens at Joshua Liner Gallery in New York this month.

Benjamin Murphy: - You appear the embodiment of your work, does art imitate life or does life imitate art?

Andy Dixon: I think my concern for aesthetics simply bleeds into every facet of my life. I’m interested in beauty and surrounding myself in it, be it in the studio, in my apartment, or in my wardrobe. I guess, in a way, it’s neither art imitating life or vice versa so much as all things imitating my love for visual stimuli.

BM: How much has being a designer affected the aesthetics of your paintings?

AD: A lot. I see my life as a designer to be a kind of visual training. It’s much easier to play around with colour, composition, and form in Photoshop than on a canvas, so, at least in regards to the aesthetic aspect of my work, I had a lot of practice.

BM: Is there any crossover between your music and your painting? How do they cross-pollinate?

AD: I think one could argue that I’ve been on a specific trajectory for my whole artistic career thus far, in music, design and painting. All three have used some form of sampling, for instance: in music as samples, in design as found and scanned images from things like text books, and in painting as reinterpretations of various tropes from the cannon of art history. In a way, I see my true medium being culture to which I use various ways to play with it.

BM: How important is it for artists to have other avenues of creation?

AD: I don't think it's important at all to diversify if it's not something that one wants to do. I've done nothing but paint almost every day for the past seven or eight years now and, honestly, it feels amazing. I feel focussed and sturdy from it.

BM: Out of music and painting, which medium do you feel is the closest expression of your creativity?

AD: Painting, definitely. I haven't made music in years and honestly don't miss it.

BM: Your paintings share a lot of similarities with the themes and imagery of the old masters but recontextualised. Is this an intentional device and if so what are you saying when you use such themes?

AD: Yeah, that's definitely intentional. There are a few things at play when I'm recontextualising art history tropes. Firstly, I'm playing with the psychology of value. Since my versions of these paintings don't contain any of the properties that the art market would say give the piece its value, such as antiquity, provenance, or even technical mastery, I'm asking the question of what gives my version its value. I'm not trying to shit on art's price tag, I'm simply trying to point to the magic of art in a kind of Duchampian way, except using money as the measuring stick. Secondly, I'm exploring the way that the subject of the original painting, say a Flemish still life, works in tandem with the subject of my painting, which is a painting of a Flemish still life. In a way they're the same thing - a depiction of luxury.

BM: How do you reconcile the lavish and the glamorous on your work with your punk sensibilities?

AD: I think my history in punk led me to the lavish themes in my work. I grew up in a culture where "selling out" was the ultimate sin so the bands who were successful had to enjoy their success in a kind of shameful secrecy and I see the same thing happening in the art world. Thus, the punk kid in me sees addressing making money as the final taboo.

BM: The show 'Alchemy' at Beers Contemporary is predominantly paintings of rooms in which other paintings of yours sit. Is this a very meta-comment on the artist being affected philosophically by the people who collect their work?

AD: I see it more of an exploration of that same taboo mentioned above. To me, it's a play on the classic theme of an artist depicting his or her own work in new works, traditionally done through studio paintings like Matisse's 'Red Studio', which focuses on the creative side of painting, while mine are done through paintings of my patron's homes which shifts the focus from the creative to the commercial.

BM: Do you think that the commercialism of art should have this much power?

AD: It's not a matter of thinking commercialism should or shouldn't have that much power, it's about reconciling with the fact that it does have that much power whether one likes it or not.