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12

### a conversation with Kyle Trowbridge

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by Eddie Arroyo

It has been sometime since I had driven onto the campus of the University of Miami. The school looks more or less the same and that is comforting given at how much the rest of the city has changed in my eyes. I meet with Kyle Trowbridge who is currently a professor of painting in the Art Department at his office/studio. Paintings are still on the wall in the process and close to conclusion and the space is occupied with books, art supplies, and a couple of punk rock posters. Trowbridge has shown in and around Miami, New York, California, Australia, Puerto Rico and El Salvador. This month he has an exhibition at the Dorsch Gallery in Wynwood with a show entitled The Politics of Time.

I sit down and we talk about his recent series but first I have to ask...

EA

Are you originally from Miami?

KT

I am originally from Miami. I moved to California and attended San Diego State University for my undergraduate work. I was a Graphic Designer working in the industry but after a while I began to think about returning to Miami. It was more to visit, but I was curious to see how the job market was and I found myself taking a job as a P.E. coach at an elementary school. This of course was bizarre and some people thought I was insane for leaving a profession that was paying me well. In retrospect, I believe I began to find the creative process for others just exhausting. The work had become very shallow and unfulfilling. It was nice making things again where I set the parameters. I was my own client and therefore I was creating things I wanted to make. I don't want to overstate it. During this

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client and therefore I was creating things I wanted to make. Ideas I wanted to engage in. During this time I took advantage of teaching during the day and at night, after work, I began painting again.

I wasn't really thinking about graduate work, but then I did enjoy mentoring at the elementary school where I would occasionally substitute for an art class. While I understood teaching had no monetary gain, I quickly realized the joys of helping students come into their own was the reward in and of itself. It became this obvious thing where, hell I'm already building up work to show, I may as well apply to graduate school. It was not my intent to stay in Miami. I considered myself a California guy. And I certainly longed for a return. Everyone I know, upon initially meeting me, thinks that I'm originally from California. I guess it's in my demeanor and my preferences. Anyway I was pretty much set on attending UCSB (University of California at Santa Barbara) but I happened to apply to the University of Miami as a direct result of artist George Bethea's suggestion. U of M ended up offering me a full scholarship with a teaching assistantship. This was an offer I couldn't refuse. At that point, there was not much of a choice. I decided to stay. It's funny though, upon graduation in '99 I was ready to return to California. It just so happened there was a small position (seemingly temporary) available at the University so I took it. And look, what are we talking about? Its 2012 and we're talking about an upcoming show. I must say though, I am deeply indebted to several faculty members at the University. Specifically, several in the Department of Art who have served as excellent mentors. Their faith in me has led to success in the classroom and inversely with my own work in the studio.

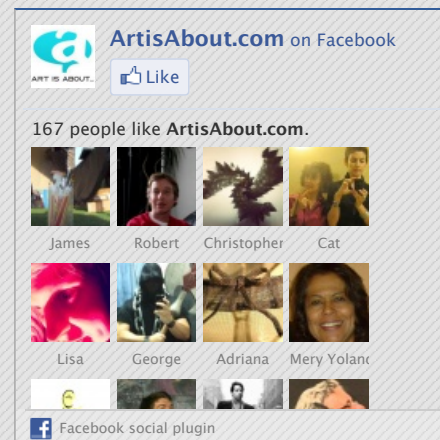
EA

Well let's talk about your recent body of work.

KT

I'm really stoked about these paintings; which are in essence quick response codes. I had known about them because they have been huge in Japan for quite sometime and as of late I began to see them being used here in the states. So it was a situation where I was looking at them and found them aesthetically pleasing. And why not? They were graphically strong and had the potential to house images and or messages. These were ripe for the picking! I found this idea quite engaging, as much of my past work has been based on buried subtext. I was thinking about art history and how everything comes full circle. Looking at this minimalist utilization of a grid and thinking about how far I can push these in terms of colorization. Almost have the code fall apart in a way as a result of the color, bury the code and use it as a foundation. Hide the phrase within the beauty of color. The goal was to create something that was aesthetically pleasing and based and rooted in a traditional sort of modern abstraction. When looking at the work the references are undeniable. We can talk Mondrian, we can talk Huszar. Neoplasticism and it's restrictions and limitations are completely at play here. Historically there are dozens of painters we can discuss that all have a hand in these works in one way or another. I want the paintings to function in a beautifully modern tradition but at the same time there is this underlying text buried within which is counter to the very history I'm referencing. It's the idea that things are never what they appear to be that I am truly in love with. So when you pick up your phone and scan my paintings, you can see the literal message it conveys.

FACEBOOK





Here at the University, we have a diverse group of faculty. And of course we all have our own beliefs as to what art is or isn't. So there will always be the natural argument of Post Modern versus Modern practices and philosophies. I have never really found myself worshipping at one church or another. Instead I look to both camps for what is truly outstanding work. This in itself, this quest for quality may technically make me a modernist at heart, but again I've never seen it as having to join one congregation or another. I like quality, craft, and aesthetically based decisions. But I also am in love with concepts, ideas and social critique. With these new paintings, I am attempting to join both camps. It's an enjoyable situation for me. Where I really like walking that line between the two

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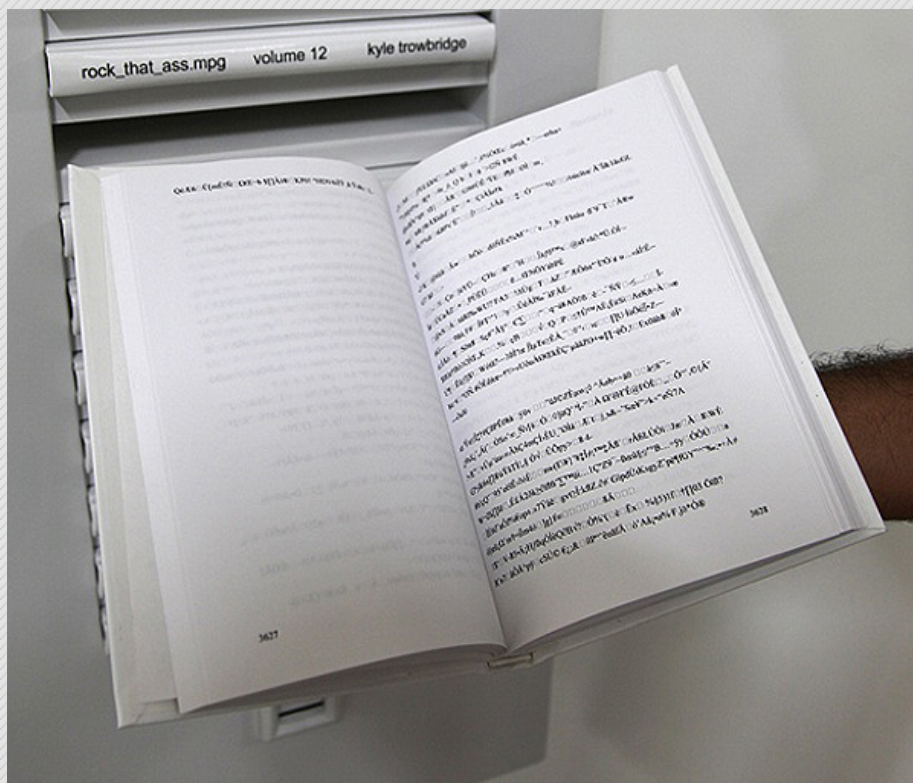
EA

How do these new paintings relate to your previous sculpture and video work?

I'm ranting about the same things. It's just that the medium has changed. The broad connection would be that it's based on digital technology. My work over the last two or three years was concerned with how much of this consumes us and has been sold to us as a lifestyle. At what price are we truly gaining the promises of speed, connectivity, globalization, and access to a wealth of information? Simple laws of cause and effect are at play here. Something gained must render something lost.

It was a natural progression for me to go into these paintings even though people may see these as visually quite different from my prior work. In the end they are really not. It's still along the same lines as far as my thought process and some times deceptive art making tactics go. Does that make sense? Anyway, I have a prior piece called "Rock that Ass.MPG" where I took thirty seconds of an MPG pornographic movie with the same title and reverted it back to its ASCII Code and then had it bound in a twenty volume set of hard-back books at about three hundred pages each. The idea was that you had all these books with pages of non-offensive gibberish. But the fact remained that it was just as pornographic as it's screen version. After all, without the code there would be no image! So I would crack jokes all the time with Brook (Dorsch) and recommend people take a peek at volume thirteen cause that particular volume was really hot and steamy. I enjoy using humor in my work. But in no way do I see it as detracting from very real and sometimes serious issues. I think humor sometimes can open a door for dialogue. After all comedians have been doing it for years.





**Rock\_That\_Ass.mpg**

2010

49.125 x 15.125 x 5.75" – overall dimensions 9.25 x 6.25 x 0.75" – book dimensions

20 offset printed books, MDF, Plastic, Enamel Paint, LED Lights

What interested me more about that piece was the content in its context. Considering who we are and where we are, sex and porn is still such a taboo issue. This country is weird about it. They suppress it. It's not something to talk about at length and so what I loved was the idea of taking something and stripping it down to this sterile non-offensive series of books that again were in actuality dripping in porn. I loved watching people as they engaged the piece. They would be looking at it and talking about it in dismissive ways since they of course could not read the ASCII code. But then I would let them

know that they were actually looking at, porno. Some people would laugh, others would giggle, some would say that's brilliant but then some would change their expression to one of shock. Suddenly the text became filthy. Or maybe struck a little too close to home for them! These ASCII Codes would eventually lead me to this current body of work with the Quick Response Codes. I think at it's root, the idea of using codes can cloak meaning in such interesting ways. Leaving my art to perform like a wolf in sheep's clothing or is it a sheep in wolf's clothing!

In these current pieces I will be exhibiting, the phrase is the sketch. It is the text that I generate the code from. Most people will experience them in a Modernists tradition and talk about them aesthetically. Color, size, shape, and rhythm are all a perfect places to begin an interesting dialogue. And for many that may be enough. This is fine. As I find it extremely important for these paintings to function well at that level. For those with the ability, need or want for more, they can interact with the paintings through their smart phones to unlock the text. This alone can change the way the painting was initially perceived. It's these sorts of ideas that I find intriguing and, in all honesty, keeps me making art. I love the idea that something may appear beautiful and inviting at one moment and then highly insulting and rejecting seconds later. I've got one that literally tells the viewer to "Fuck Off" upon scanning an otherwise unassuming abstract work. Many of these paintings are one-liners, light, snippy, others are more substantial, "I never really enjoyed the price of freedom".

EA

You're a slippery kind of artist.

KT

I just want people to take the extra minute to see with more than their eyes.

[www.kyletrowbridge.com](http://www.kyletrowbridge.com)

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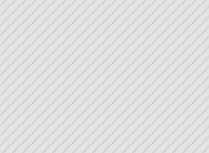
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