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IN CONVERSATION WITH EEPMON: EDWIGE BELMORE, THE QUEEN OF PUNK PT.1

by eepmon / August 19, 2012

Edwige Belmore is regarded as the Queen of Paris Punk. She has done it all. From a fierce rebel punk to walking the runways under Jean-Paul Gaultier and photo shoots with Andy Warhol, Edwige is the embodiment of a time when art was at its daring peak. Edwige's interview is in two parts. Even in two parts, there wasn't enough time to go through all of her background. Perhaps I'll do a part three and four in the future. My interview with her focuses on her 20's in the years of '76, '77 and a bit of the early '80s. I met with Edwige in East Village, NYC for a two hour conversation. ---

Photo (above): Salvatore Caputo

eepmon: A bit about your background for the readers. Edwige Belmore...

Edwige Belmore: ... from Paris, France

eepmon: and if anyone "Googled" you right now they will immediately see that you were regarded as the Queen of Punk in the '70s and '80s in Paris and New York.

Edwige: ... and mostly in the late '70s when Punk arrived in '77.

eepmon: Can you tell more about the scene during that time. How was it?

Edwige: It was quite interesting. I mean, nothing was really happening before that... There was scene in New York like the Glam Rock, New York Dolls, Roxy Music, Brian Eno which strangely enough I was completely into when I was 15 years old during high-school. Truth be told I wasn't so into music back then. I grew up convent so I never listen to music when I was a kid. I never even had a turn table you know. So in '77, the Punk Rock exploded in England from '76 - '77 in the rest of Europe. I remember in '76 it was the first time I went to see the Sex Pistols in Paris. No one at the time had SEEN anything like that! NEVER! It was the first MIND BLOWING new thing. Sadly enough today, no one is actually bringing a brand new thing into the scene. We have groups that are educated, heady, blah blah blah you know?...But at the same time, thank god we are in the Computer/Internet age to expand creations to all regions of the world.

eepmon: Interesting times we are living in because of the tools, specifically technological tools we are given to us to create.

Edwige: Though there are a lot great bands now, unfortunately today we have bands that say "We do Punk Rock" and they do exactly that because they are like Punk Rockers exactly 30 years ago. "Ok dude! We been there, done that! Throw up on the stage. Cool! Your pants are ripped. Great! You got it all!" 30 years ago you know? It's funny, a lot of losers back then



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wanted to do Punk Rock because they don't actually don't know what to do and that was a very easy way out for them at the time. Some didn't even know how to play bass at all. But that was the style of the times, it was them of then. It was a social movement as well.

Fighting the system, the establishment.

Myself I was going through my own personal pain. Because of my separation of my parents. Being completely alone in this world. They gave me \$20 to have a life. They moved into the country side and I stayed in Paris. I was completely abandoned. I was going through personal stuff at the time. By the end of '76 I had an identity crisis, I didn't want to be that Edwige I had been until then. That little girl that grew up in the convent and parents who were completely ignorant, racist...I did not belong with them. So I had to find away to cut off from this...It's like an apple branch growing off an orange tree. I had to sever this.

It was November 6 of 1976, I decided that in exactly a month from then that on December 6th, "Edwige Will Die, and Edwige Will Be Born" but all my friends didn't understand what I meant so they thought that on December 6th I was going to commit suicide. I was 19 years old. The day before December 6th, I went out and bought one pair of pants, one shirt and a pair of shoes and a little tie and an super cool old vintage leather jacket that was given to me by a friend. And on that day, I took all my clothes that I brought with me before and put it in the fireplace and burned everything. And to top it off I wanted to shave my head to completely start fresh. But the barbers back then, nobody wanted to shave my head! It was 1976...A young girl of 19 years of age, there was no way they wanted to do it. But maybe in '77 because the Punk style started to come in... Finally I got someone to do it and I had completely this amazon look - Riding pants, high heels, white shirt with a skinny tie, with a big old beaten leather jacket that's so cool, shaved head...I was some kind of alien, amazon, dominatrix or something.



Photo: Philippe Morillon

eeptomon: Were there photos of it?

Edwige: Yes, Helmut Newton took pictures of me at the period. But of course Helmut never gives his prints and I actually never saw it. I know it was in exhibition because my friends in Australia told me, "Oh my god, this is crazy, there's that picture of you, the first one you took with Helmut!". I was topless sitting like this with my arms crossed supporting my breast and in that apartment...it was completely dilapidated. It was old royalty, old bourgeois... like in Cuba, paint is peeling with that sort of background. Standing tall with my arms crossed, standing strong. I had still had a baby face looking strong! Actually, the people I was living with were all connected with artist and I became a kind of mascot with the group. My hair started to grow and made it into a crew cut and bleached it blond. Annie

Lennox had the same haircut a few years later than I had at that time. That is when everything started to blow up in my life '77 onwards. From then, BANG! All of sudden I'm going to so many parties. Punk is happening. I ended up at Paloma Picasso's party dressed in the same outfit again. Yves Saint Laurent, Loulou de La Falaise and Andy Warhol, they were all there.

eeptomon: This was in New York or Paris at that time?

Edwige: This was still in Paris. I came to New York at the end of '77. The whole Queen of Punk "coronation" happened in Paris. I looked the way I looked and Helmut kept on following me everywhere during Pablo Picasso's party and he kept saying, "I have to take your picture! I have to take your picture!". I knew who he was and Helmut was quite a controversial and provocative photographer at the time. Today nobody gives a shit but then they were the movers and shakers. And then I was taken to a different direction. All of a sudden I was the Punk of the salon with the rich and famous people.

eeptomon: I remember you mentioning being the madame of the house

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Edwige: Well no not yet. I was really shy. It was my entry to this world and I needed to be strong. I was only 20 years old coming from a convent from really boring, ignorant, racist parents. I wasn't all over the place yet but because the way I made myself look I need to be strong. Things moved very quickly. I was in a club and these two girls approached me and said, "Wow you look great! Want to be part of our band?". I said "OK!". I never played anything at all and they put me on the drums and away I went! We were a mythical band.

We were called L.U.V. it mean Ladies United Violently or Lipsticks Used Viciously. We were FIERCE looking. They were punked out but really sexy. At the same time the newspaper and media were all going, "What is Punk? What is Punk? What is Punk? What is going on? What is this movement? What is this new thing?" And for some reason I was asked by Vogue, Elle, Nouvel Observateur magazines to do interviews. I don't know why but one interview led to another. They thought "Oh! She must be the leader of this movement." From there, there were two guys at the time who were doing a new magazine...kinda of a paper magazine of the '80s. It was completely underground. Really cool.

eepmon: What was the name of it?

Edwige: FAÇADE

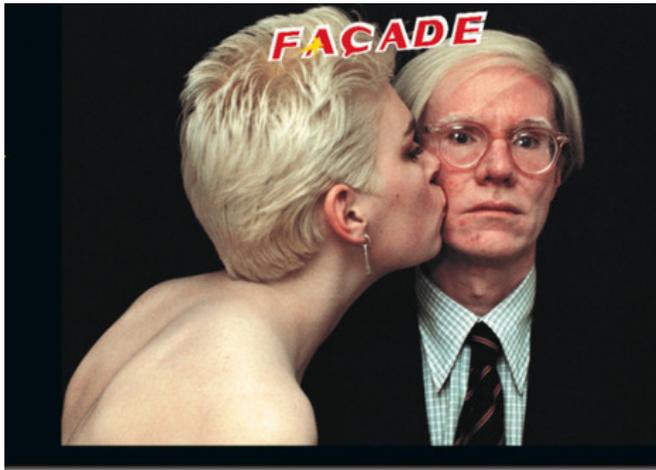
eepmon: Of course!

Photo: Pierre et Gilles

Edwige: Alain Benoist and Jean-Luc Maitre were nice people and approached me. They said to me, "We are doing a whole series of magazines where the cover and the back are connected by two people. We would like you and Andy Warhol on the same cover. We are thinking the headline: Pope of Pop meets the Queen of Punk." Façade made it that happen because they saw the perfect fit. I think it is because I knew the two groups 1) The young people in the sorted little bar, and 2) the upper elite class which continues to this very day.

eepmon: So that was the photo of you and Andy Warhol where you were kissing him on the cheek.

Edwige: Pierre Comroy was the photographer who took the photo of Andy and I. The front cover was Andy. I was on the back. He had a lipstick mark on his cheek with my photo as a button pin on his blazer. Inside there is picture of me kissing him.

eepmon: Crazy. It must of been fireworks going crazy. Quite a response no?

Edwige: Yea but pretty much everyone of Façade was quite amazing. Every cover was amazing. One other cover was with my best friend, Djemila Khelfa who is an Algerian women, super sexy, super gorgeous, super BAM! in your face. She wore these really slick black vinyl tights with high heels, big leather jackets, lips like this big with red on it, curly black hair. SHE WAS FIERCE. But at the same time super feminine like a James Bond girl. Interestingly I think I might have been the only one which the photo was taken together.

Façade is doing a huge re-edition of all the 13 magazines.

eepmon: Which one were you in?

Edwige: I don't remember... Hmm I don't know. Façade's website on Facebook or their official site will have that information. But the re-issue is going in to this box and there is going to also be issue 14 of today. So in the issue 14, there is one theme called The Kiss. It is related to the kiss I gave to Andy Warhol. To write about that...what the kiss means to me.

That's going to be part of this special re-issue box set. It's going to be truly an art piece. They are re-creating the whole vibe. They had a huge retrospective a few years ago in Paris, they used my picture with Andy Warhol for the cover and invitation, posters and in the

windows of the gallery in Paris. It was GIGANTIC! I was on the three windows...Huge arch windows. They flew me there and the experience was amazing.

eepmon: Incredible. The history in the making indeed. So the theme of the article is multidisciplinary and that is exactly why, that since you have done so many things, fashion...

Edwige: Yes, actually '77 was the explosion of fashion. People like Jean-Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler, exploded in Paris that came out with fashion styles that never existed. Especially Jean-Paul, he inspired himself from the street. Today, it is the street that has to be dressed like how a magazine says. Back then it was not like this, Jean-Paul Gaultier was creating stuff by looking at the people in the street. It was the contrary, he was the one with an interpretation. You know, it is like a real artist does. When Picasso looks at a woman and puts it on a canvas, it might not look exactly like the women could be like, a whole coloured face. But you know it make sense, it was 30 years ago things needed to explode back then.

eepmon: There needed to be a shake...

Edwige: yea the '50s and the '60s... The '50s especially were a little stiff in fashion. Great and I love it and fantastic people like... Dior, CoCo Chanel but the '60s got a little more daring. Especially the British. In the '70s to the end of '77s there wasn't really anything going on. And Jean-Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler and some others started a new vision of fashion. Jean-Paul used the Punk Rock look and created something new with it whereas Thierry Mugler went on a more science fiction, spacey feel. Jean-Paul was really street. He wanted to be inspired by the street... it's like you buy a jacket at a thrift shop, chop chop you recut, you resew it, you redo it, you reshape it and then you send it back to the street and it's like a million dollars and completely different. So... not many people could do that. He could.

eepmon: It's kind of like you are giving back to the street.

Edwige: Exactly!

eepmon: It must have been quite a time...

Edwige: It was amazing. I mean I am very, very blessed and grateful to be born in that time...

eepmon: ...You were indeed! You were in the smack-dab of when freaking shit was happening.

Edwige: Yep exactly. The music, the fashion...the movies that really exploded. Things were way more daring for that time in the '70s...

eepmon: ... and you were in the middle of it all. You were in all directions. What I feel is that they would look up to you, because of the unique position you held, and your multidisciplinary connection to those worlds.

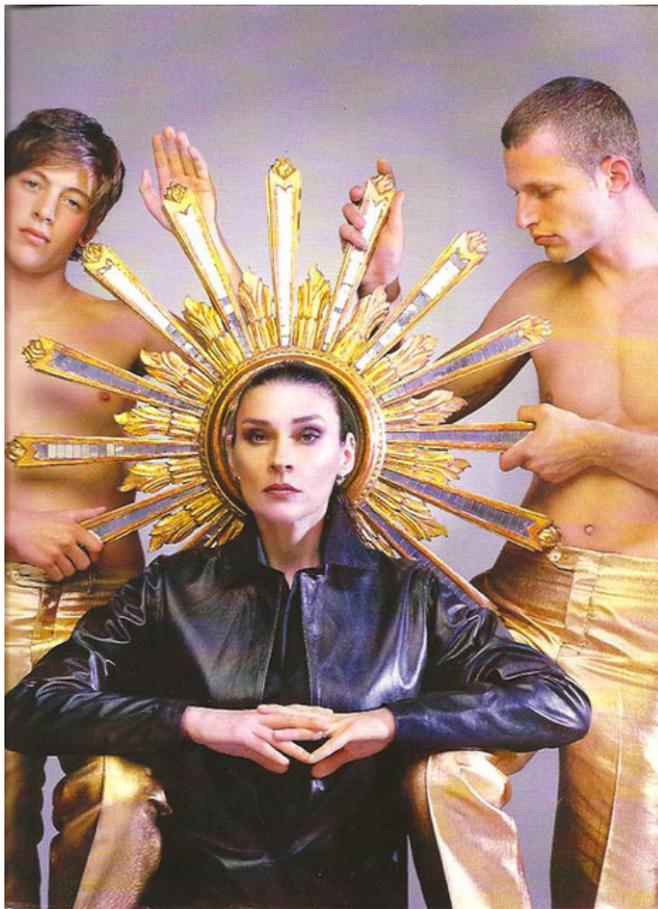


Photo: Fritz Kok

Edwige: I guess I had some magnetism. Jean-Paul Gaultier came to me and said, "You look amazing. Do you want to be in my show?". I was never a model, I don't want to be a model...! But of course he didn't approach me like that, he was like do you want to be in my SHOW which is whole different meaning. I was approached by Helmut Newton not as a model but as a personality. So when people ask me if I modelled, I say no, I never ever belonged to any agency except for when I went to Japan. People come to me and ask me to be in their shows. In '79 and early '80s the whole Japanese wave arrived. Yohji Yamamoto, Kansai Yamamoto, Rei Kawakubo of COMME des GARÇONS. It was austere, black and white... except for Kansai Yamamoto who was COMPLETELY crazy with all these gold and red and this and that and crazy colours. He had a crazy spark of madness!

eeptomon: So did you meet them in Japan at the time?

Edwige: No that was before. It was still at the end of the '70s. I went to Japan in '82. I met them in Paris and that was the first time that the Japanese shows were coming to Paris. They had some Japanese models like Saiyoko, and this other Japanese girl who was super tall. GORGEOUS! I did a show with Yohji Yamamoto, COMME des GARÇONS and one with Kansai Yamamoto. Fashion kept going on and on and kept getting daring. First show with Jean-Paul was daring but not as exposed. The second show was the big one and that was the first time I was doing it. It was crazy at the Intercontinental Hotel in Paris... Everyone was taking drugs and drinking champagne like crazy because we were like all street kids! We needed to calm our nerves before we get on that thing because we were not models. That's cause that is what Jean-Paul wanted. He wanted to see us walk how we walk on the street...more like our own swag. He never wanted to do 'that walk' like how the girls do it today or whatever. No! He wanted people from the street. Get the fashion from the street, re-create it showing it and giving it back. I was pretty drunk... very high (everyone was) but it worked out fine! At the end of the show though I was doing the finale. I'm wearing high heels, black stockings with a big tuxedo jacket with marabou feather. I was so gone and I was suppose to sing "My Way" Sid Vicious version. I got on the runway and a little close to the edge... I was so tipsy and the music started... and SOME GOD put be back on my balance because literally I had one foot that went outside the runway and right back onto it... and could have fallen! But everything went well, finalized the show but everyone was like AHHHHHHH! I was like walking on a tight rope!

You know...it was the punk era, even if we fell in the hole we didn't care!

Same thing when we went to some parties. We would crash at this advertising group... very bourgeois and horrible... but we were able to slip in. And when we got in, the man would

open the door and we'd just cause a rucus. We jumped on to the punch and the drinks and took over the place. Of course we always had those blood gel capsules.... and I remember they were having a "PUNK" party those bourgeois. And what they did for "PUNK" they were wearing tacky 70 suites, beige jacket... they would attach this cigarette butt with a safety pin to their lapel. That was the "PUNK" touch.

eeptomon: and you were like, "Give me a f--n break"

Edwige: I was like "F--K YOU!" So I'm swallowing my blood gel pill drinking a lot beer and punch and making sure it's going to be epic. Then I went to this very pretty pale blue bathroom and I puked all over the bathtub. All blood into the bath tub as if someone had been killed. It was hysterical! We were 20 years old! It was nothing harmful. It wasn't like puking on the Louis XV chair. Some other punks would do but I always have a respect for art, design.

Anyway, the advertising group were really uptight.

eeptomon: because usually they would follow where the buzz was...

Edwige: and at the same time they were not really daring. I know that. With my bleach blond crew cut, Pierre et Gilles were doing campaign for lingerie and they really wanted me as one of the models as I have such a close relationship with them doing photographs in the '70s and '80s. I tried them on, Pierre took some snap shots but the advertising executives were like... I could actually hear them in the other room, "She is beautiful but we can't show that!". Because it was too daring. This was in '79. They were not daring to do stuff... they just wanted to sell their shit. And you know obviously people who looked like me would not be buying that kind of stuff. Advertising means that you need to go to the people who will buy your stuff.

eeptomon: The mass majority. And I think this still exists today. The advertising mentality still requires that they gotta sell their stuff and therefore needs to maintain a certain status quo to please the majority.

Edwige: Another time though, I did a six page make up portrait for Marie Clair. Pierre et Gilles were the photographers and they insisted that Edwige would be in it. There was no other way. I have these in my archives. There was three shots for the Fall. Two make up style and one natural style. It was beautiful. It was like a centre fold.

Then end of '77 is when I started to make my moves to NYC. Andy Warhol took me here and touched base with him and we went out to Studio54. Maripol and I became very good friends.



Photo: Edo Bertoglio

I return back to Paris. I was married at the time... Another punk thing that we did. Personally I decided... that to actually get married at the time was more controversial than "Free Love". We wanted to deconstruct the establishment, to actually get in their sector kinda like the trojan horse. Once you get in there, go BAP BAP BAP! I married my friend Jean Louis Jorge, Dominican Filmmaker. 15 years older than me and a friend from Chanel made me a mock Chanel suit out of terri cloth, white towels.

Drugs was a very very huge part of that era. At that time in Paris it was mostly heroine and making people uninhibited.

Fabrice Emaer, regarded as "The Prince of the night", owner of Le Palace, the Parisian version of Studio 54 he asked me to represent the Le Palace at the door. I was 20 years old, I was in my little tuxedo, bleach blond crew cut, big red lips, six body guards and I was the person who decides who comes in and who doesn't. This was when I was 20/21 years old with this kind of power. That was a huge responsibility. Fabrice told me, "Just imagine if this was your house. You take it upon yourself to decide, do you want this guy in my house?" So I had to choose who can come in or not.

eepmon: Fabrice Emaer trusted your intuition.

Edwige: Absolutely. Olivier Zahm is a very famous art director, Purple Magazine - he called me up 7-6 years ago and said, I'm doing an interview on Le Palace. He sent me 50 huge questions...It was crazy. Took me a whole week to write it. I sent it back and he got back to me and said "My god this is crazy and amazing because you remember so well, so candid, so true about it... wow I'm really glad that I called you." When the magazine came out, the title of the article was EDWIGE of Le Palace.

eepmon: Yes! He reversed it!

Edwige: It was suppose to be LE PALACE with Edwige. But I did share so much about my first hand experience there. This was back in '78. You know we just barely scratched the surface about what I've done... we are still in Paris.

eepmon: Incredible. All this in a span of three years...

Edwige: But then I started to come to New York. I made more frequent trips staying with Maripol. Through Maripol and I met the whole New York scene. In 1979, Claude Arto the other half of Mathématiques Modernes and showed me this style with synthesizers. We called this the Cold Wave in Paris and the New Wave as well... well more for New York.

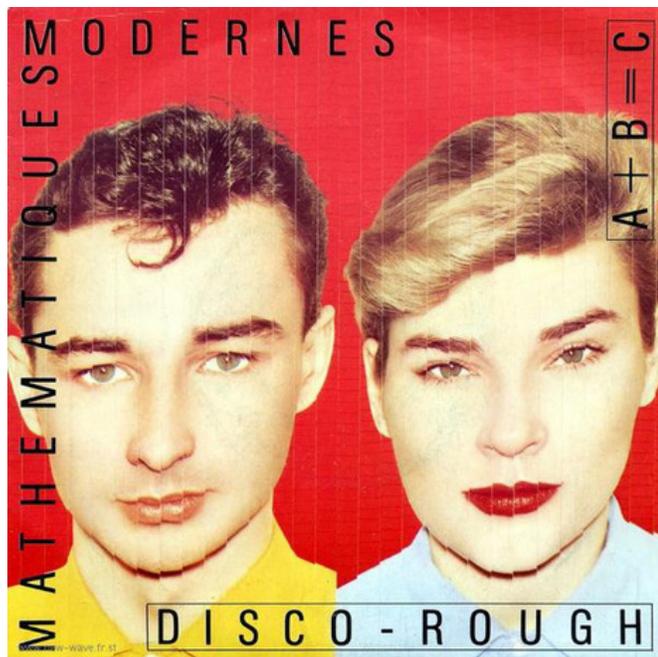


Photo: Pierre et Gilles

eepmon: Yes and it can still be heard on YouTube! It's awesome. So you discovered you liked to sing and you just went for it!

Edwige: Well I didn't really know how to sing yet... so you mean you can listen to it, it's super simple.

eepmon: But what I love about it... like what you were saying like the time on the catwalk, you want to see real people how they do it. There is nothing to pretend. It's really about you just doing it! When I listen to it I purely feel that raw and realness in your work.

Edwige: and you know I'm more of talker as well so it was easier for me to write the lyrics and follow the melody but I've never been trained for music so I didn't know to actually bring a melody myself. It was perfect for me the Cold Wave because we were all about DAN DA DA DA DANG DA DA DA DA DANG! hahaha

eepmon: I'd say you are certainly a self-learner.

Edwige: Autodidact

eeptomon: Yea! Multidisciplinary but you are so able to take something and put that Edwige mark on it. These days if people were presented the same situation that you were exposed to, they would just freak out and give up. They don't know how to handle it. But you, you're just YEA! Just do it! Boom boom!

Edwige: Yea and I started to go to NY more often back and forth but still doing shows in Paris. Finally in December of '81. We had no money, like we were like drug addicts, I was proposed by a Japanese model agency to come to Tokyo for 6 months. They would pay for my flight, apartment.

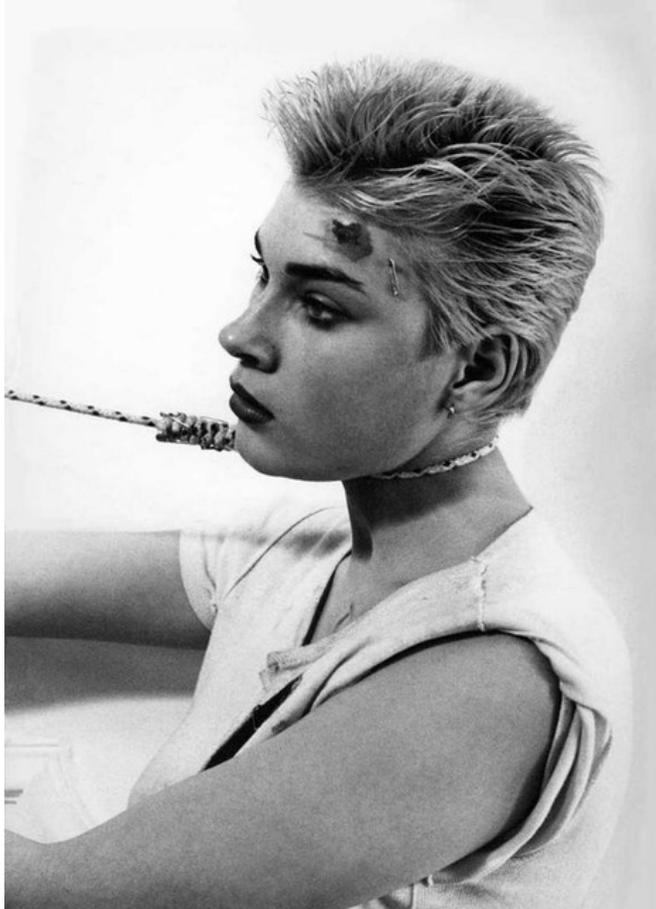


Photo: Laurence Sudre

eeptomon's note: To be continued. Due to the extensive nature of this interview, I decided to split Edwige's interview into two parts. Part two will be available on Friday, August 24th.

A track from Mathématiques Modernes - Disco Rough

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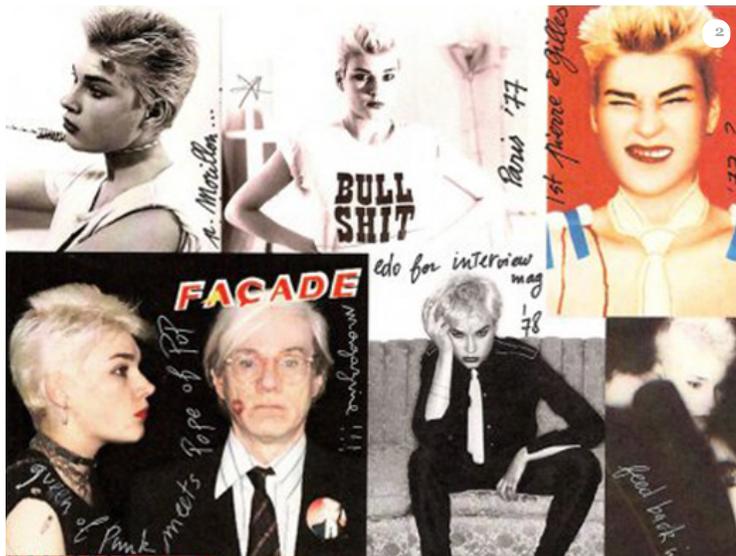
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IN CONVERSATION WITH EEPMON: EDWIGE BELMORE, THE QUEEN OF PUNK PT.2

by eepmon / August 24, 2012

Edwige Belmore is regarded as the Queen of Paris Punk. She has done it all. From a fierce rebel punk to walking the runways under Jean-Paul Gaultier and photo shoots with Andy Warhol, Edwige is the embodiment of a time when art was at its daring peak. This is Part 2 with Edwige Belmore's interview. We pick up from **Part 1**, where she began to talk about her fashion/modelling experience in Tokyo, Japan. ---

Edwige: I was thinking... Tokyo? C'mon, when will I be able to go to Tokyo? When will I ever be able to go to Tokyo? I don't even have that kind of money and doubt if I will ever have it. It was a great opportunity to make some money and my girlfriend at the time was a model and was going as well. She introduced me to the agency and they knew who Edwige "e" was. They were like Oh! Edwigee! YEA! We want Edwigeeeee yea! Next thing you knew, it, I was throwing stuff away, packing my stuff. Got to the airport and I was flying Aeroflot. The Russian airline... Oh my god, it was in an air bus... A BUS. It was TINY! It felt like you have to put your arm out and go like this! (makes a gesture)

eepmon: Cross continental, on an air bus... Holy sh...

Edwige: Oh my god... and full of models and we were over six feet tall. And the seats were so close you could not sit normal. You were like this! Your knees were touching the seat on the front and your feet don't touch the ground! The whole time! The stewardess was this massive woman in a grey frock with a mustachio, literally felt like some institution... jail or something

eepmon: Up in the air for 15 hours...

Edwige: Meanwhile we were originally thinking like "Yea! Russian airline, we are going to drink vodka it's going to be great. It was impossible to get a drink there! She was coming with a big plastic jug of water... probably from the sink.. I was thinking... this is amazing... really crazy. We could have taken Japan Airlines, but they were so expensive... even for the top models who got paid very well. Aeroflot was our only option... So I did that. I worked my six months. It was great.

eepmon: Wow, I wonder what Tokyo was like in '80s?

Edwige: The fashion shows are done differently in Paris. There were no shows in New York at the time. The shows in Tokyo, each designer had the whole day for their show. That means we get there in the morning at 8am, then we get hair, makeup, in a robe... then we do one free run with our robe to see how the flow works. Then the second one, we do another one with the clothes. Lunch, and then three shows in the afternoon.

eepmon: One designer per day... whereas, today the turnover from one designer to the next is so quick.



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Edwige: Yeah, it's pretty crazy. After the third show, we go to dress back and go to the reception and chat with people, drink, champagne. Relax, dinner, then have to go to the BIG party at the club.

eepmon: How was your experience in Japan aside from the fashion? Did you go to restaurants, walk around?.

Edwige: Yeah, of course, I had a really good Japanese friend. Really a crazy guy! That is what I wanted to do. I wanted to go to Shinjuku and see the dirty little bad stuff and he took me there and since my hair was short, I could have passed as a boy.

eepmon: Yeah, Shinjuku is still regarded as having that red light flavour. Kabucho district especially.

Edwige: Yup, but back then it was far more intense! Yeah, he also took me to the temple in Asakusa. It was beautiful. As you kept going up, you pass by all these sake vendors. You know, they all had different sake that I had no idea. They have the milk one and a very thick one that you feel you're drinking rice soup, but it was like BANG. Of course, I had to try ALL OF THEM! Oh my god, I've never seen it like that, what does it taste like? I was super young, but getting super buzzed and he showed me all the traditional ways of praying.

eepmon: What was his name?

Edwige: His name was Katsuo. He was also a heroine addict just like all of us in Paris. A gay man, really tall. He was a little taller than me... and for Tokyo standards they considered him Superman in his circle of friends.

eepmon: As a tall person yourself, you must have noticed the clear height difference in Asia compared to the West.

Edwige: Yeah, I mean especially when you are walking down the street and you're at the big cross roads where everyone starts walking together. And I'm literally looking at the sea of black hair with suits walking, half my height size. I got lost once, but they were so kind to me and helped me find my place. It was so beautiful. I did everything I could when I was there. I had amazing guides. I lived in Roppongi and if you went further down there was still these little boutiques and there was this onsen called Azabu Juban Hot Sping. When you walk in, there is the lounge area with a little theatre stage and people actually do their theatre play for each other, but they were customers!

eepmon: Really? Theatre?

Edwige: Yea! They do a little song.

eepmon: Wow. I've never seen that when I was in Japan...

Edwige: I learned the sake drinking song with an old man. Completely candid and random. Just people who came out from the onsen, they're not performers. This old man told me come over and me as the "gaijin" trying to get me on stage to sing a la la la la type American song. But I wanted to learn a Japanese song so I learned the 黒田節 - Kuroda Bushi which is the Japanese sake drinking (folk) song.

eepmon: How does it go?

Edwige: Oh, I remember a little bit. (Edwige sings an excerpt from Kuroda Bushi)

eepmon: 素晴らしい すごい! (Excellent! Great!)

Edwige: And then there is the part in the song that goes "kuroda bushi" - you put the sword inside the person. haha It's so funny I remember it.

eepmon: Oh man!

Edwige: I remember it... I have stuff like that just stay in me, you know? I mean, I don't remember what I did last weekend. Friday, Saturday, I don't even remember how many hours I worked at the store. I can't do it to save my life. I don't even know if I was there! As of like... 1982 in Tokyo, the kuroda bushi song I'm like, yeah, NO PROBLEM! haha

eepmon: Well, these certainly are very memorable experiences.

Edwige: Yes, these get into your skin. I mean, as you can see I can remember exact dates! Like, oh yeah, it was December 6, 1976 when I shaved my head like most people don't remember shit at all.

eepmon: Certainly they were pivotal moments in your life. Your history. It's not a day-in-day-out thing.

Edwige: Those are big impacts in my life. It's really my history. So that's how I arrived in NY. When we finished our contract, we went back to America through Hawaii and Los Angeles, and she had an apartment in NY, so we went there. It's a road, it's a journey, one thing after the other and I'm now hanging out with everybody.

eepmon: And you came at another amazing time. In the New York scene where things exploded there too. So tell me, what is your connection with agnès b.? How did that come about?

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Edwige: Well, Agnès actually open her first store in '75 in Paris. In '76 I moved in two blocks away from her boutique with my boyfriend at the time, who was 16 years older than me. He was the coolest, coolest fucking cat in town. He was very glam. I mean, he knew Roxy Music, Brian Eno and he wore like leopard suits, platform shoes, but the really glam rock thing. Awesome. He was the first man in Paris to have a loft. Anyway, we were two blocks from Agnès and in that neighbourhood was like the East Village of the time. She was really respected, very cool, different style but very honest and pure. Nice cottons, classy cuts.

eepmon: And she was working in there.

Edwige: Yeah, she was working in there and young artists would hang out. She was there with her two sons who were drawing all over the walls and stuff. I met her then, but after that our paths just split. I met her a few times through the years and now two years ago when she was opening this gallery boutique on Howard Street, she really needed me to be there to represent her. Because, first of all, it is the first gallery/boutique in New York City and people don't really know to be in a place like that. Then you have the sales people that cannot exactly be part of the gallery/book side of it because their role is to generate sales.

eepmon: ...Someone who was very multidisciplinary. That knows these two worlds.

Edwige: Exactly, so that was Edwige who has known artists, photographers, through the years and I knew her before so I know her personality, style and her integrity and I respect her tremendously. And she made this special position for me: Maitresse de Maison (The lady of the house). I'm not a manager, a sales person, a curator, I'm just the lady of the house.

eepmon: I love that. I remember when I first met you, I knew there was something special about you. So I asked, who are you? And you replied, I am the Madame of the House. I was totally impressed.

Edwige: I know! Which is a little bit difficult to say to the corporate head offices. They are like, "What do you mean? What does she do?" I mean, that was difficult at the beginning when I started there. People didn't have a clue why I was there. I was told by a person that it must be pretty cool to be paid doing nothing.

eepmon: No!

Edwige: Yeah, one person said that.

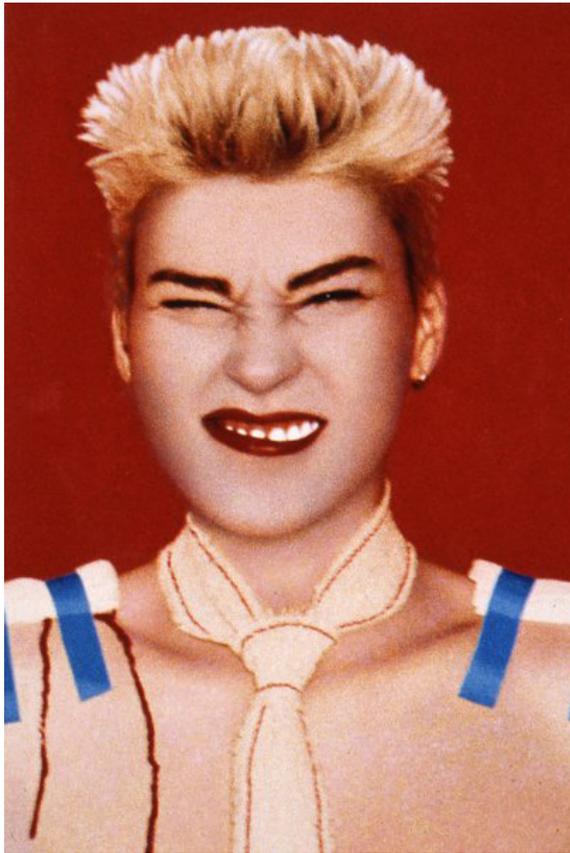
eepmon: Franchement.

Edwige: Oui. I was like, I'm not doing nothing, I've been something for my whole entire life. This is right now, I am here to do and bring all the essence all of that right here.

eepmon: It is that missing magic... how should I say, that lost quality, that lost value that brings life to the space.

Edwige: Yeah, and especially in the situation as two different spaces really...

eepmon: ... as a gallery and retail. Because I believe that Agnès sees that you are the perfect fit because your whole life was exposed to so many dimensions and channels.



Edwige: Yeah, and maybe it's because she knows who I am through the years because I've been talked about. Actually when we first open in April 2011. The first exhibition was part of her personal collection. She owned the first Pierre et Gilles photo which is me. The one with the crew cut and the blood on the shoulder. She owns that and she bought that a long time ago. That picture when you face the cash register there, right between the two dressing rooms, my picture was right there. HUGE! and she would put her picture underneath to the right. That was fucking awesome. That was showing and symbolic that this is Edwige okay? This is her place. She told everybody, this is Edwige's house. She comes whenever she wants.

eeptomon: When I was in Japan, agnès b. boutiques are everywhere. The brand is very popular over there in Asia.

Edwige: I know! In Tokyo, and in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, they have the chocolate and pastry boutique agnès b. The flower boutique agnès b. ...

eeptomon: ... and The Voyage Boutique agnès b. When I was in Tokyo, there was a big freaking thick book that commemorates the history of agnès b.

Edwige: Wow.

eeptomon: I should have picked one up. But I did take a photo and I should send it over to you.

Edwige: Cool. And that's funny you know the picture of me, the grey picture from Des Jeunes Gens Modernes? They did a T-shirt with just me.

eeptomon: Awesome.

eeptomon: Edwige! You should do your own T-shirt!

Edwige: Yeah...with my face on it?

eeptomon: Yes!

Edwige: Yeah, but it's always other people's photography. That is why I am putting together a coffee table book of just me.

eeptomon: Yes. I remember you telling me that.

Edwige: Just me... as the muse of 75 different photographers and artists. It will be like ... How did Andy Warhol see me? How did Helmut Newton see me? He saw me with shaved head, boobs showing and horse riding pants. Black and White. How did Pierre et Gilles see me? How did Helmut's wife see me? I'm talking about people who saw me as a muse. This is what my coffee table is about.

eepmon: Excellent. Have you started on it yet?

Edwige: I'm working on it with Maripol now, since she did one and plus I have a lot of writing to do. So we're trying to put things together.

eepmon: I am looking very forward to it.

Edwige: I have a Francesco Clement painting. He doesn't know where I put it... it was so long ago, 30 years ago... It's not lost, of course, but somewhere in the storage place. I don't know where, unless someone bought it. Which is amazing because that was in the '80s here in NY. He did portraits of all of us that belonged in the scene - Maripol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Wendy Whitelaw, who is a gorgeous make up artist. When Clement finished the portrait, Wendy said "Hmmm... Something's wrong..." Literally in front of Clement. And she took her makeup case and she redid her makeup on the Clement painting. She redid the lips with the colour of her own lipsticks, eyeliner. It was genius! Me? I'm like with my eyes half closed and completely blue.

eepmon: Blue?

Edwige: Yeah, 'cause probably I was nodding out or on drugs. Blue, blue blue blue!

eepmon: So what is going on right now?

Edwige: Yeah, so besides the coffee table book I'm doing with Maripol which is HUGE. So much material. I also work on making the feather necklaces.



eepmon: (I have one by-the-way guys!)

Edwige: Yeah, I made a special one especially for you.

eepmon: I love it! Thank you very much.

Edwige: I have a partner, Sara Lundgren, who came up with the concept first. Right away when she showed me, we took up and started making them. We are working on a collection page for caratime.com. They represent a whole bunch of jewelry makers. Pretty high

quality. Big names. Vintage Chanel, vintage Hermes. It's kinda like an online mall catering to the very high end market. So we will have a page and we are currently taking photos of our collection of six necklaces exclusive for the web. Some background about Caratime. Basically it's two women who started this. One lives in New York/Paris the other lives in London. The actual real show room is in London and they are very well connected to the press. We have plans to send a collection to London as well.

eepmon: Is this going to be in August 2012?

Edwige: Well, August is going to be in a couple of weeks...

eepmon: Time flies.

Edwige: Yeah, it won't be ready in August, but keep an eye out for it!

eepmon: There is a group show that you are going to be involved with.

Edwige: Yes, the group show theme is The 7 Deadly Sins as of... you would write them for death of the people of the future. That is the theme of the group show. Imagine you are writing the Bible, now you are writing the 'new' 7 Deadly Sins' so artists have to envision what this would be like in their eyes.

eepmon: In this case you are planning to use your photography pieces. Please tell me about them.



Edwige: It's my close up photography work. It is actually the same object and I have about 500 photos of it. But every single photo is different. I put the object at different lights and shades resulting the picture to constantly change. It's completely random as if it has a mind of its own. All of a sudden it becomes iridescent and I don't even know where it comes from!

eepmon: Yes and I remember the hues that you were able to achieve... very vibrant!

Edwige: Yeah! It just does it by itself everyday. If I put it over here it becomes a yellowish gold and turn it around and put it over there it turns like BRGGGGGGGG!!! the same shape, but blue and then turn it again it becomes a whole different thing. Some pictures look like inside of the body... you know fleshy and bloody kind of things. It is so strange and I have no idea how it could have turned out the way it did. It's really like my eyes and what I see and what is given to me. I perceive stuff and feel stuff.

eepmon: Your photography work is a reflection of your inner self.

Edwige: Yeah... and that is why I call this piece: The 'I' Within because I do everything with my iPhone!

eepmon: You have already chosen pieces for the 7 Deadly Sins show. Have you thought of how you are going to execute this?

In conversation with EEPMON: Edwige Belmore, The Queen of Punk Pt.2

Edwige: I want to print them on transparencies because I'm going to present them as light boxes. I'm going to build them to ensure that the colour of the light boxes can fully accentuate the work. It's going to go up like a totem pole where the very top is a piece that represents "You Shall Not Kill!".

eeptomon: It sounds like a very vertical structure. Feels like you're walking into a sanctuary, isn't it?

Edwige: Yes, and that is one thing I felt because I want to GO UP!... not just walk around a flat surface on a horizon.

eeptomon: Man... We covered a lot of ground here...

Edwige: ... And we missed all the '80s and '90s.

eeptomon: Oh, man!

Edwige: Yea we covered the end of the '70s and beginning of the '80s.

eeptomon: How about we call this part 1 and 2?

Edwige: Yeah. It's the beginning and a bit of now. Because I have another photography project, tattoo project and other stuff.

eeptomon: That's right and I think this is excellent because if we can spin this into a little series...

Edwige: ... That would be awesome. I'd love that.

eeptomon: ...This can be part 1 and 2. Because there is a lot of stuff! I don't want to...

Edwige: I mean, you have edit all that..

eeptomon: We are almost at 2 hours...

Edwige: Wow...

eeptomon: I have to look over this and see how to make it compelling without leaving out the details. Well it's an absolute honour and pleasure to have this interview with you, Edwige. Thank you so much and see you when I return to NY from my game launch.

Edwige: Thank you!



The day Edwige and I traded art for art.

More at *Sara Lundgren and Edwige Belmore Feather Necklaces* and *Edwige Belmore's website*.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH EEPMON: SHIMPEI TAKADA, ANALOG & CAMERALESS PHOTOGRAPHER

by eepmon / August 20, 2012

Shimpei Takeda is an artist from Brooklyn, NY working primarily with analog photographic techniques. His body of work consists of extreme closeup macro shots of water, dust and crystallized rock. He also works without the use of a camera, creating photograms with materials like salt and water, through the interaction of photo-sensitive material and light. This cameraless process results in abstract surreal still images. Born in Sukagawa-city, Fukushima-pref, Japan, the recent Nuclear fallout has prompted Shimpei to continue his abstract photography work, this time to record traces of radioactive contamination on photographic materials, cameralessly. Shimpei and I got together at SuperCore, a Japanese dining café in Williamsburg, Brooklyn to talk about TRACE.

Photo (above): Keita Sone

eepmon: Great to have you here, Shimpei.

Shimpei: Always nice to chat with you Eric!

eepmon: Ok, just so that our readers know, please tell me about TRACE.

Shimpei: As the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster occurred close to where my family resides, within 40 miles, I have been working on an on-going project, "Trace - cameraless records of radioactive contamination". Radiation in the contaminated soil exposes photographic materials as direct and physical documentation of the disaster.



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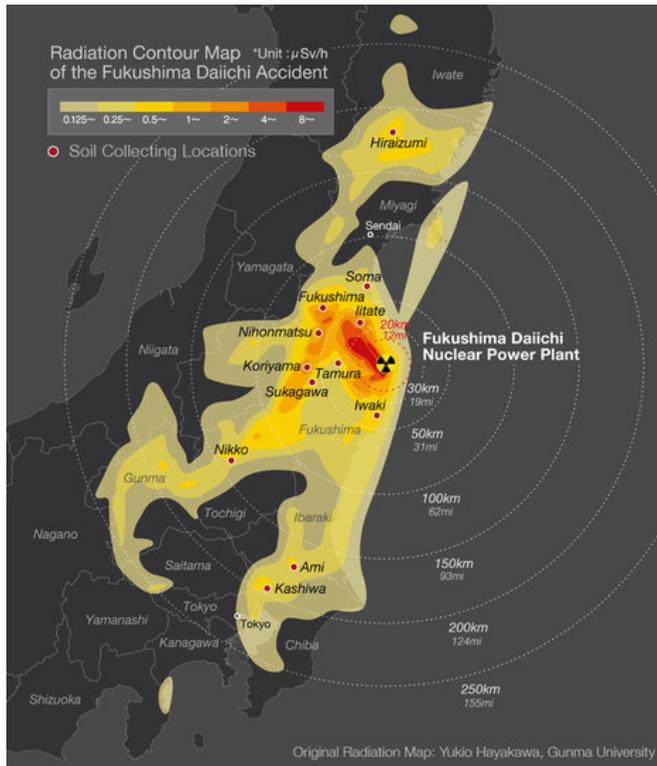
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eepmon: What is your process? How does it work?

Shimpei: Basically, silver halide gets darkened by light, as a chemical reaction. That's how the information is captured on light sensitive materials, such as films and enlarging papers. Both radiation and visible light are the electromagnetic radiation. They just travel in different wavelengths.

eepmon: TRACE started as a Kickstarter project. You went to Japan to collect 8x10 inch soil samples around Fukushima prefecture where the nuclear fall out had occurred.



Photo: Keisuke Hiei

Shimpei: Yes. It was quite a project because I had no idea what the soil samples would yield. I don't know what will come out of it.

eepmon: But it is that isn't it? The fact that WE just don't know. We can't see the radiation. I think that is what makes TRACE conceptually valid and in some sense does an amazing yet eerily visual representation of it.

Shimpei: While I was developing the TRACE project last year, Shing02 and I were discussing and wondering how they would actually turn out. We originally thought it would be less sharp... and therefore more abstract, less focus. We didn't think that it would be that sharp!

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eeomon: It's a lot of work!

Shimpei: ... It makes me puke to just to think about it... collecting so much soil!

eeomon: Now jump back to today, you recently did a collaboration with Aya Nishina and Ryuichi Sakamoto at the Stone in Manhattan.

Shimpei: Yes it is an Experimental Music venue.

eeomon: It must have been quite something to have this opportunity to collaborate with him. How did this come about?

Shimpei: It all started with my friend Aya. We have been in previous discussions to collaborate on a visual/sound piece. The Stone hosted a week of Sakamoto-san's curating improvisational performances. Aya was chosen for one of the artists, then she asked me to join as video projection. It was a special performance.

It also turned out to be a good opportunity to share the TRACE project with Sakamoto-san. He has been active in environmental issues and anti-war efforts over the years, so certainly he was interested in this.

Next month in August I am planning to go to Japan again, to collect more soil to create the mural-size TRACE. They are going to be 4x8 feet! That's 1 to 2.5 meters.

eeomon: Are these going to be projected or actual TRACE work?

Shimpei: Yea it's going to be TRACE itself and are thinking about the best way to present it. I'm hoping that I can get as much support as I can when I am there in Japan. Sakamoto-san is helping the production for exhibiting. A lot of things coming up.

eeomon: So your time in Japan this coming August. TRACE part 2? Collecting bigger soil samples and...

Shimpei: Eric...4 feet by 8 feet is 50 times bigger than 8x10 inches. Just imagine how many huge bags I have to fill with contaminated soil! It's not going to be easy.

eeomon: How are you going to do this?

Shimpei: I want everything to be seamless. I will probably get a large bag, get the same amount of contaminated soil. As much as I want to go to Japan next month... sometimes I have second guesses because there isn't much time! Not only that, I need to find out where I can put this stuff. I could put it in my grandpa's garage...

eeomon: Here is a question. This poses a lot of technical challenges because of the scale. Is there any way to work at a 10% level and then photographically enlarge it? What do you feel about that?

Shimpei: I actually enlarged an 8x10 negative to 40x50 and I just didn't like it... the idea of enlarging... As a physical documentation of the nuclear disaster, it should be 1:1 real size. It's the conceptual thing. Though it will make my life much harder! haha

eeomon: Totally for sure.

Shimpei: Sakamoto-san encouraged me and it's a big deal for me. I have to do it as humanly as possible! I think 4x8 feet is still a manageable size.

eeomon: You have to expose it onto photo material of that size. Can you find photo material that's 4x8 feet?

Shimpei: I'm using 5 rolls of 100 foot photo papers with a 42 inch width, which creates 60 of 4x8 feet TRACE.

eepmoN: That means because this is sensitive to light you have to unroll this in the dark.

Shimpei: Enlarging paper I can work in safe light. Much easier than film. With film I have to do it in complete darkness wearing my infrared goggles. That was very uncomfortable... especially in the winter because my body was warmer than room temperature, it kept fogging my goggles... it was one of the worst times of my life...

eepmoN: This was in February...



Shimpei: Yea... that really was not fun at all so I'm excited that I can work with photo paper working under the safe light you know? That was just awful.

eepmoN: So you have an online store? Can you tell me about that?

Shimpei: It is a publishing company / online store. It's still in the progress to shape the company, but at least right now It's basically TRACE's fundraising store.

eepmoN: I got one!

Shimpei: Yea! I already made these prints so I felt it was fitting to continue to fund raise and sell these prints. So Aya encouraged me to come up with the idea of creating the online store. The store is called SHIKA.

eepmoN: What does SHIKA mean?

Shimpei: Shika represents poem, song? A sort of haiku of poet writing.

eepmoN: hmm I'm going to tackle this tofu right here... Ok... so you have to start promoting the store and your work in the store too.

Shimpei: So now I'm writing my TRACE page of the site and a write up of the proposal. So Sakamoto-san agreed to drop his name as a production support which is so great. This will be connected to the SHIKA store and 100% of the funds will go towards the TRACE project.



eeptomon: When will this be live?

Shimpei: As soon as I finish the writing and the website which I'll need your help on!
Hopefully this week.

eeptomon: **Happy to help! Well Shimpei, I wish you well on your upcoming project with TRACE. I'll certainly be keeping an eye out for you. Keep doing what you're doing.**

Shimpei: Thank you Eric!

**eeptomon's note: On August 8th, 2012, Shimpei Takeda returned to Japan to collect more soil samples for his second iteration of TRACE.*

More at **Shimpei Takada** and his TRACE book and prints are available on **online store**.

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In conversation with EEPMON: Shingo2, MC



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5 Questions for Scott Wilson



Rollout - The Wanderlust Interview



IN CONVERSATION WITH EEPMON: SHINGO2, MC / ARTIVIST

by eepmon / August 21, 2012

Born in Tokyo, raised in Tanzania and England, Shingo2 came up in the independent Bay Area scene in the mid '90s. Over the course of his independent career starting in 1995, he has made the transition from sample-based music to live performances with a full band incorporating traditional instruments, while remaining true to his hip hop roots. I caught up with Shingo2 at Atlas Café in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. ---

Photos: *Tokio Kuniyoshi.*

eepmon: Please introduce yourself.

Shingo2: My name is Shingo2, I'm mostly known being as a Japanese MC, Hip Hop musician. Shingo2 is my stage name but I also like to do graphics and video, to stay involved in the art scene.

eepmon: Absolutely. And we are definitely going to through these things. Great to have you here. Of course many people know you through the Japanese anime series Samurai Champloo - Battle Cry and of course your Luv(sic) series. You collaborated with Nujabes (R.I.P.). He was an amazing producer. How was it working with him?

Shingo2: He was a very unique individual. Quiet guy, but he was very particular about what he wanted, not just creatively, but personally. So I think a lot people saw that part of him as an introverted artist, but the audience really related to him through his work.

eepmon: And what is interesting is that I felt that he was very picky who he wanted. It was a very global thing. We've got FunkyDL, Specifics... people all over the world. And for someone prolific it must have been an extensive project for everyone and for him.

Shingo2: I mean it's commonplace for people to collaborate with overseas artists now. Back then, you didn't have social networking sites, you had to approach them directly to see if they even responded in the first place. It was very much a hands-on approach, it wasn't as easy as posting on a site where you could expect an immediate response.

eepmon: It's really about that trust factor, establishing strong relationship.

Shingo2: I always think that, you know, as far as the works I did with him. The first Luv(sic) we recorded in 2000, just looking back on how things developed into a series, and as more people caught on and people still discovering it, we didn't even know what we were doing in terms of recording. You know what I mean? It was really like, let's figure it out as we go along.



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eeptomon: ...and that would be in a sense was a very organic, grass roots...building that thing up.

Shing02: During the creative process too, for sure. All the recordings, if we had all the tools now I'd definitely edit them more. A lot of the times I would just do it at the studio, thinking it would be a rough mix and then it'll be on a record without me going through all the takes. It was really done in a spur of the moment type thing.

eeptomon: I think that this spur of the moment, rough mix... we all caught on to that because the feeling is very raw, really real. Personal.

Shing02: Yeah, also especially in Japan, how Nujabes' style developed into a category on its own. People started selling records under the label Jazzy HipHop... not just artists, but stores and distributors, they would advertise it in such a way like, "This is such a beautiful combination of melody and drums..." everybody just chopping up piano samples. It got to a point where it was too saturated, and even Nujabes was very aware of that. Over the years, we wanted to make sure that we weren't just throwing random tracks into the ocean you know? I tried to keep it honest as much as possible. It has to catch your ear first. It can't just be whatever mellow track that you know you're going to sound good on.

(Click the images below for full sized images)



eeptomon: Yeah, and it appears that after the post-Nujabes scene that people seem to caught on to some sort of formula...

Shing02: Yeah.

eeptomon: ...With the music and it became redundant.

Shing02: I mean it still is. But you know, if it's unique, it's unique. It shouldn't really sound like anything else. That's just my opinion.

eeptomon: The Luv(sic) series. Are you planning on continuing?

Shing02: The thing is, after we finished part 3 and Nujabes wanted to know if I would do another one. There was a timeframe when he was sending me different beats, I told him that I didn't want to do a sequel without having a theme. So I suggested to him, why don't we do another trilogy, since we already have something of a franchise with 1,2,3, and people like each one for different reasons, and like to compare among them so I felt I didn't just want to add to that. Why don't we just do another set with a different story? He agreed to that idea, so we started to exchange ideas based on that workflow, and I finally liked a beat which became Part4.

As it stands, we still have Part5 with Nujabes' beat and Part 6 was discovered on Nujabes' cellphone. It was titled Luv(sic) Grand Finale. The label found the session and gave me the beat, and I got a harp player in LA (Rebecca Raff) to play over it. They are both recorded, they have to be finalized. Should be out by the end of this year. It's going to be the end of another trilogy and that's going to be it.

eeptomon: I see you most than just a respected hip hop rapper from Japan and U.S. The theme I am doing for MOCO LOCO is Multidisciplinary. Having followed your work for so many years, I see the many dimensions of Shing02. There is more than one Shing02 at work here. One of the things I really think you have is an entrepreneur side of you. Inventor of the Faderboard as for one. Can you please explain to us a bit about that?

Shing02: Okay. The Faderboard is an instrument manufactured by Vestax Corporation of Japan. In the mid-late 90's they definitely ruled the DJ mixer market. Vestax greatly benefited from the fact they had an office in Northern California so the Skratch Piklz would collaborate with them and tell them the features they want in a mixer. That's when

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scratching and turntablism were blowing up. It was standard for a DJ to buy two turntables, a mixer with a good fader, and battle brakes.

I'm not a scratch DJ, but I always enjoyed working with them. I was always hanging out in that scene, going to DMC Battles. I'm friends with Q-bert, Yoga Frog, and by watching them...in a way they were role models. Through watching DJs, I had all these ideas, maybe you can use the fader which is basically an on/off switch but also a percussive instrument. You're cutting and making notes, patterns and rhythms. Why can't you do something more musical than being restricted to a record on a platter? And then one day it hit me, what if these sounds instead of being fed are pre-recorded? Then I was like, I can just put a whole scale on a digital recorder, I'd use a multitrack recorder and put the faders up and down and cut with a mixer. It became my instrument! I took this system and did a demo at Vestax and they liked the idea right away, and went ahead with the development. It ended up being an expensive machine for what it was, but the Faderboard is still in distribution with the stock they have left.

eeptomon: Hmm I wonder if you can hook it up to the computer and program it to do something with it?

Shing02: That would've been good man. I really wanted to push it from 2002-2005. I was part of a trio called Kosmic Renaissance, I was playing the Faderboard and the Arp Odyssey synthesizer. Doing the same thing, playing the synth and cutting with a mixer. We had David Boyce on the saxophone running it through mad sound effects, and Sameer Gupta on tabla and drums. We did shows for a few years between US and Japan, and during that time I wasn't even rapping. I was really pushing the boundaries with fader music. That was a period which was like the antithesis of entrepreneurship, but having it made was a huge accomplishment.

eeptomon: And that's what it's all about. You know when I mean by entrepreneurship I think every artist in themselves are one and you gotta experiment and take risk.

Shing02: It was really interesting to see the reaction. A lot of people got it right away and took it further. While other people asked "Why do you want to make it more difficult to play music if you are just going to do scales?" But they don't understand the fact that you can do so much with fader that you can't do with a key or a button, or a dial.

eeptomon: We can move to your watch collaboration with ALIVE Tymetable. Because you showed it to me when we had dinner last week and you're wearing one as a matter of fact. Please tell more more about it.

Shing02: My friend Hiro runs the company, we always talked about doing a watch together. He came to me with the idea, "I have a mechanism with 3 rotating discs, do you want to design something?". I designed 3 or 4 different ideas, some pretty experimental. We couldn't do fine print on the disc, or at least the people didn't have the equipment to do that. So this was plan B, but I'm very happy that we put this one out first.

eeptomon: When you do your collaborations whether it is a product or with another artist, is it a 50/50 collaboration? Do you see collaborations as an equilibrium between different creators?

Shing02: The percentage is never pre-determined. I enjoy giving feedback even if my name doesn't end up being on it, I always enjoy doing that. So even if I were to have the final say on how the product is made, bouncing off ideas ends up making it better.

eeptomon: Have there been any situation where you had butting heads? Conflict?

Shing02: Of course. But you always have to explain the reasoning, why an idea can be better than the other. As an artist, you always want to do something different, not something predictable. But from a marketing standpoint, you want to do something relatable. You don't want to do something too left field. So there's always that. For example, even for this (picks up his watch), we had to be on the same page that the top priority isn't how easily you can tell the time. We vibed because Hiro already understood the fact that most people use their cellphones to check the time, so a watch is more of a fashion piece. As long as we establish that, and the function is guaranteed, then it's a good product.

eeptomon: I can totally relate to that. In my past collaborations... sometimes things happen, you gotta explain your reason. But sometimes it works out for the better, but sometimes also there could be a fall out.

Shing02: Ah for sure man because..

eeptomon: As artists, we have to be protective of, you know, our creations too.

Shing02: I totally understand. I think this is a struggle that every artist goes through whether you're a musician, graphic artist, film director, right? When you are catering to somebody, you basically have a client that you have to satisfy, communicating your idea till you finally materialize your vision. That communication is an art in itself.

eeptomon: That's right.

Shing02: You know, you can't just say BOOM this is how it's going to be, and I'm not going to listen to you. You almost have to artfully introduce the idea. Sometimes you're not even fond with that one, and you have to kind of gauge their reaction and then you present them something that you really like.

eepmon: It's certainly also a trial and error thing too.

Shing02: Of course!

eepmon: And for me I'm beginning to go through these phases. The more I do collaboration the more I learn, the more I can gauge situations.

Shing02: Exactly. Ideally you would be working with somebody that you can build synergistically. You wouldn't have to worry about what the other person would think, but in certain situations you have to be polite and have to tip-toe around their aesthetics... you really have to know how to maneuver the right way. It's one way to say f-it, you don't care about those things, but it will actually make a difference in the outcome. You have to be a good communicator and I learned all that through trial and error, I did freelance jobs in and out of college, I did graphics, part-time gigs, working on video games... Those times were frustrating you know? Some jobs were rewarding, people really like what you're doing, but half the time you do something that you think is great but the middle-man is like.... (does a weird reaction)

eepmon: hahaha

Shing02: ...You know, they aren't even involved with the creative process. Someone who's the director, the middle man between the company and the worker bees. That person isn't even going to be credited and neither are we, but still he's trying to call the shots and now you're forced to do something else. Stuff like that, I didn't really enjoy at all.

eepmon: It is interesting to get your insight on this. I totally agree with you. When I look back at my experience and I'm sure you look back on yours...that we grow thicker skin, we learn how to adapt and we learn to see how the game is played.

Shing02: Yeah exactly.

eepmon: It hurts once, it hurts less the next time and even less and less and so on. That's how I see it.

Shing02: Yes and those experience were so valuable to me, now that I work with people I might keep giving them feedback to the point that it sounds like I want something different, but I always make sure that that's what the person is going for as well. So that we're on the same page. If I ask someone to do an album cover, I might give the artist like 10 different feedbacks. But its not like I'm controlling them, I want them to see what I'm seeing.

eepmon: Another collaboration is the animated film, PETALS OF FIRE that you written and produced, animated by Kodai Tanaka. I find it's an interesting juxtapose from hip hop rap/lyrics. This animated film has no lyrics what-so-ever. Was this intentional and were you looking at ways to bring out certain dimensions of your audience's emotional responses?

Shing02: No doubt. I had that idea since watching Gulf War I on TV as a teen. Looking at patriot missiles, wishing they were fireworks instead... That idea stuck in my head and it developed into this short story idea. As far as the animation not having any words, it was important that people of all backgrounds can understand it visually, so I don't have to put subtitles. That was the point. It's like this man, whatever idea you have, something small, something grand. You always look for the best way of executing it, and I've always been that way. For example, you think of a joke or a punchline... what's the best way to deliver this? Is it just in a conversation? A monologue? Is it in poetry? Should I put it on a t-shirt? Can it be a title for a song? Should it be a theme of a movie?... all these things you explore in your head. Then you distribute them in different boxes of ideas... like oh! this would be an awesome script, so I'm going to save that. So that in the occasion that I meet someone, we can develop that idea further. That's how I've been working since I was young, before hip hop. In fact, hip hop helped me realize that you can actually do all this without technical training you know? It's all about doing it your own way. That really inspired me. Be multidisciplinary, if you want to call it that? To be the jack of all trades. So you're right, people who know me only as an MC might think, why is he doing that? But I've always been doing that.

eepmon: It's always been rooted in your core.

Shing02: Yeah! It's kinda like, you know, you walk into English class and discover creative writing for the first time, and finding that freedom to do whatever you want with it.

eepmon: So did hip hop help you discover that light bulb moment which set you off to where you are now?

Shing02: It's been the light bulb for a whole generation pretty much. This whole idea of cutting, pasting, collaging, putting messages behind it...it is a very powerful art. Because obviously hip hop is taking elements from other art forms that came before it.

eeptomon: Hip hop I find builds confidence and is about empowerment. I think it was really fortunate that you were exposed to it at a very young age to realize that potential.

Shing02: and also the Bay area was very encouraging for an Asian artist to be expressive and still be accepted. As I mentioned before, we had these role models as well that weren't afraid to say "I'm a hip hop artist" you know? It might have been different in New York in the early 90's.

eeptomon: or 90's in Canada!

Shing02: yeah!

eeptomon: So Oakland, California?

Shing02: Well I went to high school in Menlo Park and then went to UC Berkeley.

eeptomon: Oakland, California in the 60's and 70's huge movement. A movement of one common goal, one common struggle for equality. Can you tell me a bit about the BPP?

Shing02: The Black Panther Party?

eeptomon: Did you draw influences from their advocacy and message?

Shing02: Of course but being in the Bay, you learn about them through your peers. Obviously you have Tupac Shakur, his mom was a Black Panther and he was a part of Digital Underground. You see parts of that legacy. You still have Black Panthers doing workshops, it might not be a direct influence but you can see it in our generation, our parents were involved in the civil rights movement. Then I learned a lot of through Japanese American communities. They were watching what was happening, not just in the Bay, but nationwide and walking with Martin Luther King Jr.

eeptomon: Was it a pretty big Asian American movement as well in the Bay area?

Shing02: I wouldn't say big but there are activists that are still active to this day. People carry on the legacy of internment which was a huge discovery for me. People understand it's all related, they're not separate incidents. In the East Bay it's very much rooted in the culture. People are socially aware and politically conscious. It's different than any other place.

eeptomon: So now, we are here today with Shing02. Rapper/Activist roots from Oakland, California, immersed with friends who were descendants of the movement.

Shing02: Basically. We had friends that were ethnic studies majors, they also talked about issues, reading books...

eeptomon: ...and we come to today and we still see this struggle all over the world.

Shing02: Of course! Of course.

eeptomon: Now we can shift the activist and social roles that you have been involved in. The Arab Spring. Can you shed some light of your views and your exposure to that situation?

Shing02: Okay. This is 2011, I was in the Bay working on my nuclear report which is a whole other issue.

eeptomon: We'll get to that too.

Shing02: I was introduced to Shadi Rahimi. She had already went to Cairo and she had documented the youth movement there and one of the characters was a rapper. I watched her screening and was intrigued by the whole scene and especially the timing. I was introduced to Karim of Arabian Knightz and he knew me through Samurai Champloo.

eeptomon: Everything comes full circle.

Shing02: Exactly! I had been to Egypt 30 years ago which is ironically when the Mubarak regime started. So I thought it was only fitting that I pay a visit. They were like come! and I wanted to take a break from what I was doing so I just went over there for 6 weeks. It was such an eye-opening experience.

eeptomon: Please tell us what you saw.

Shing02: Since it was 6 months into the revolution and it was during Ramadan there were hardly any tourists. The city was still alive and people's eyes were wide open like what is happening. Of course the city is peaceful but when you go to Tahrir Square there is a huge protest going on every week, and people still angry about the countless lives that were taken by the military. My purpose wasn't necessarily only for me to see what was going on, it was mostly about wanting to hear what the people had to say. I was there to listen. I was in the studio with people and talked to them a lot. Half were fluent in English, and those are the voices that you don't hear from the news.

eepmon: Right.

Shing02: Hardly ever! You only hear of clips from extremists or militants... you don't see the everyday, bilingual multicultural student who knows what's going on and can break it down very intelligently. Those are the voices that need to be heard.

eepmon: The media has certainly been focusing on things that only provide a narrow view of what is going on in the whole. General consensus is that the media isn't being fully transparent with its viewers.

Shing02: Yeah, it's so corrupted. For example, one protest I went to, there were tens of thousands of people. There were families, kids, they built a stage, they had prayers, songs, speeches...it was such a festive atmosphere. Then on the same night the more extreme crowd went down to the Israeli Embassy since there was another incident where an Egyptian soldier was killed on the Israeli border... so they smashed windows, one guy jumped on their roof to take the flag down. That event was sensationalized by the media - like "Violent Protestors Attack the Israeli Embassy" but when you are there, you see tens of thousands that were there to drum up the revolution. They weren't there to be violent. So things like that, become so one-sided in the news. I understand that people gathering, singing, praying is not going to make the front page news as much as the other incident.

eepmon: The media appears to gravitate towards things that are shocking or catch people as if it came out of the movies.

Shing02: Exactly. Basically everywhere around the world is just like here. People just chilling at a cafe talking, you know? Everywhere! Even in Libya or Syria right now it's just like this. People chilling. But the media wants events. They don't want lifestyle or what people are thinking. They just want to report things and are waiting for things to happen. They don't really want to go into the city and talk to people about what they want or what they're thinking. That's why I think it is so unfair sometimes what foreign journalist do. Unless they're from there, they are coming from a whole other background with a different education and they are reporting things as they see it, you know? Obviously they are entitled to do that.

eepmon: How would you go about emphasizing the people's voices? How would you go about bringing that into the light?

Shing02: To the forefront?

eepmon: Yea.

Shing02: Well, now...well you mentioned the Arab Spring which is symbolic because people utilized networking tools to spread the message and get the information across. What and when things are happening. I don't necessarily put it on one company like Facebook or Twitter. People already had cell phones at a much cheaper cost than here mind you, so people are really hip to communicate with one other. They already have a natural skepticism towards the media which is good! People should be skeptical about where the information comes from. Only the younger generation will bother to be out there and say, "This is what is happening and don't believe the news" because relatively speaking, they have nothing really to lose. That's why people need to be more expressive. Even if you don't know the whole truth, at least express what you know.

eepmon: and I think it's like not to be afraid of being...

Shing02: Being wrong...

eepmon: yeah or the conscious of, "Oh you don't know the full story..." ...

Shing02: Exactly.

eepmon: I think it's important to express yourself in that view.

Shing02: It definitely restored my faith in art because I was definitely losing faith in America, in hip hop and materialism. (sees an activist he knows and calls out her name. We get introduced and chat a bit). So let me finish about Egypt. It really did restore my faith in people doing art for pure motivation. They really see that change is possible first hand, and coincidentally when I came back to New York the Occupy movement just started. Regardless of what people think of that now, at least people are little bit more aware that America is suffering. It's not fine and dandy. Cities are going bankrupt. Politicians are corrupt, it's on record. Even if we can't institute change right away it makes a world of a difference that you don't remain ignorant about these issues you know? That's one form of resistance. To stay informed. Even if you won't act on it, or can't afford to act on it, at least stay informed.

eepmon: That would be the most powerful thing to have for everyone.

Shing02: That has been my work in Japan as well. The point isn't to be in a debate or to win an argument. At least be informed for your own sake.



eepmon: We move from the social causes and into the environmental causes.

Shing02: Okay.

eepmon: Of course as well all know 3.11 and the Nuclear fallout marked a significant turning in Japan. I know that you've been actively involved with the Nuclear issue before all that happened.

Shing02: I started in 2002, but officially since 2006.

eepmon: You've given presentations all over and you went to Fukushima with Shimpei Takeda, my previous interviewer with the TRACE project.

Shing02: My presentations are more like workshops. I've had requests from Universities but I haven't fulfilled them all yet.

eepmon: Can you elaborate more about the research and the work that you have been doing on Japan's Nuclear fallout.

Shing02: Up until now, people have only learned one version of the story by the government, the nuclear industry, and scientists hired by them. Then you have another school of scientists and doctors that are more from a public health stand point. Not just limited to radioactive material, but people who are generally concerned with public health. The industry wants to know the level at which things start causing visible harm, so that they can set a limit to how long workers can be in that environment. From a public health perspective, we are looking at the most sensitive of populations, with babies at the top of the list, how much should they tolerate? It's more of a moral question. How much risk should they be taking on when they are in the mother's womb, or an infant with radioactivity in their bodies. The answer is clearly zero. It shouldn't be in their diet. But the fact of the matter is, it already is because of our history of contaminating the world with nuclear bomb testing, and then from uranium mining to using them in reactors to reprocessing spent fuel rods, and on top of that accidents happen regularly. So these guys in the political arena, their whole MO is to protect their nuclear industry. It is only understandable that they are going to minimize the risk of ingesting radioactive materials, and these huge leaks aren't suppose to happen in the first place. They aren't even prepared to talk about health hazards once it becomes a public health issue. They are not prepared. They are only prepared to deal with situations happening in and around the plant. They can't even start to implement a plan to protect the lives of the people that are living under normal operations, let alone accidents.

eepmon: With the ingestion of radioactive material. Can you elaborate more on that? I did go to empire22 (e22.com)...

Shing02: It's all in Japanese. That's another thing I got to work on the translation.

eepmon: There are essays, articles and diagrams of the material that you've been researching.

Shing02: It's very simple. The fact that we are burning uranium as fuel, it creates hundreds of fission products. When you split uranium, you get all these elements that are radioactive, and they decay into other materials which are still radioactive. Every element is different. You basically create so many scenarios where radioactive elements could end up in the food chain and could deposit or concentrate in your body.

eepmon: It's happening right now.

Shing02: It already is happening. We have trace amounts of fission products in our blood probably right now that were never around 60 years ago. To what extent that's affecting our health? We will never know for sure.

eepmon: In June 29th, 2012 there was the Never Start Japan's Nuclear Plants protest that was happening and I was listening the news and they were talking

about the Japanese government wanted to start up the Nuclear reactors again.

One thing I found really interesting is the media emphasized that because in the summer time, there is a lot more demand of energy and therefore we need to restart. But I can't help but think that there certainly economic factor that plays into this. That the dollars are more of what they are looking for versus the former.

Shingo2: Well it's both, you know? If they were to lose all value on their nuclear infrastructure, they will go bankrupt. That's without a doubt because they've been investing so much with great amounts in subsidies. It's not like electric companies one day decided to build nuclear power plants. It was ordered by the government. They wanted to rely on uranium more than buying oil and natural gas. That's why they invested so heavily in uranium mines themselves.

eepmon: so they could be self-sustainable.

Shingo2: Yes, that was the goal.

eepmon: Currently how many nuclear power plants are active in Japan?

Shingo2: Active? Meaning operating?

eepmon: Yes.

Shingo2: Technically 1 out of 54. (note: As of July 11th, 2012)

eepmon: Gaging down the road, do you think that it is almost inevitable that they will slowly turn them back on again. Public health should be priority one however there could be great economic ramifications if they don't.

Shingo2: Well, that is a very multilayered, multidisciplinary discussion. First of all, what are we dealing with? People are demanding that the government draw a different plan for the future, so that we don't have to rely on nuclear energy. That's the future we are talking about. At the same time, we already have a situation in Fukushima where things are still not contained. It's not getting any worse hopefully, but it's really hard to talk about these two things at the same time, and also impossible to talk about them separately. So what have we learned from this experience, really?



eepmon: I think that with this incident, this could spark a rejuvenation of people becoming a lot more aware, transparency of government and all these messages.

Shingo2: Of course! There is always going to be ways to justify what they say, and there is also going to be ways to show them otherwise with real data. Supply and demand of electricity, the peak amount of energy use, price points... My whole point is that we need a balanced argument. It's the same thing with the environment, the public health issue, and the economy. You can't just take their word for it, "Hey, we are going to have rolling black outs if we don't do A, B and C." That's their perspective. Now that people are more keen on the issue and they are demanding answers, asking intelligent questions... it's harder for them to just roll out something and have people accept it. All in all, I think people are learning, so long as people stay informed and educated, that's key. It's a necessary change

that needs to happen. Regardless of how many reactors get restarted or how many more plants they are trying to build. People need to have a shift in how they view the technology and the risks, not just the technical but the social risk, moral implication of having something like that in your country, you know what I mean? It's not just about science and math. People's lives were dramatically altered, changed, and destroyed because of this one earthquake... the tsunami erased thousands of lives but then the nuclear power plant destroyed lives because of radiation because you can't even see.

eeptomon: What can I say from computer engineering background, rap, hip-hop, culture, collaborations, inventor, director, performer, activist for humanity and the environment I see you with truly a man of cause and a multidisciplinary individual. Any last words or comments?

Shing02: Thank you. As a final word, a lot of my friends wear just as many hats as I do. We say wear many sandals in Japanese, "waraji" by the way. I think you should challenge yourself to work with people in different trades. Sometimes you get interesting results that way. I encourage people to explore more and in the case of activism, when you take in all the data, it could be boring and daunting but there will be a time when it intersects with lives of real people and you will be in a position to empower them. It's really about empowering people with knowledge, rather than discouraging them with information which can be depressing sometimes. For example, giving them statistics like "this many rain forests are gone in this many years..." but we should turn that around into saying, "this is what can we do to increase the rainforest".

As an artist, creating things, using energy and materials - we all share this contradiction that we are part of the problem even while we are talking about solutions. We drive, we ride on airplanes, even the cleanest of the clean energy is never 100%. Having said all that, we can really start to investigate what we can do on our own that's more sustainable. There are two different scenarios, corporations deciding what is best for you, and you choosing what is best for yourself. It's never black and white. There's always these grey zones with gaping holes you have to fill in. If you take others' word for it, you're never going to understand where the truth lies.

Going back to our very first point, art is all about communication, it's all about persuasion. Politics in Greek means the art of controlling people, originally. It's an art. So you have to master the art of communication, otherwise you can't create anything that's worth people's time and energy.

eeptomon: Thank you Shing02.



Below are some videos produced / performed by Shing02.
For more information please visit e22.com.



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IN CONVERSATION WITH EEPMON: JAZ HAROLD, FINE ARTIST / SCULPTOR / ILLUSTRATOR

by eepmon / August 22, 2012

Jaz Harold is a fine artist / illustrator who has a taste for surreal, pastel worlds with a hint of the grotesque. Originally working in 2D, Jaz has been actively pushing her work into the physical realm, creating abstract 3D sculptures that are subtle due to their colours yet striking at the same time. Over a late night coffee at SuperCore, I met up with Jaz to chat about what she's been up to.

Photo: *Youngjun Koo / I'M KOO*

eepmon: Tell me about yourself.

Jaz: I studied at the School of Visual Arts as an Illustration major. Right after graduating I did some illustration jobs, a bunch of photo retouching, and ended up doing work for photographers and fine artists. Eventually my own work turned more towards fine art than illustration. I guess it was based on the influence of the people I was working with.



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cepmon: When I first met you, you had done a lot of illustrative work and now you seem to be moving towards a more three dimensional level.

Jaz: I like three dimensional better. I think it is easier to work with. When I work in 2D, because of my background in illustration, I always feel it has to have a specific narration to it which ends up making it a bit cliché. I give too much information. Working in 3D I feel I don't have that same inclination and an artwork can just be what it is. So I can make art that's a little more interesting because I'm not over explaining it.

Recommendations

-  **Behind the Scenes: Rubens Cantuni**
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eeptomon: So with your sculpture work, please describe one of them. How about the one of the head pieces. What is the name of that piece and medium?

Jaz: Geode. The majority of it is a rubber resin...

eeptomon: It's a cast of your face right?

Jaz: Yeah, it's pieced together from a few casts. It was a cast of my face, a cast of the back of my head and ears, and a cast of my neck and torso. All frankensteined together. The whole thing was left hollow, so when I was casting it I was really just rolling the resin around in the mould several times to make a thick shell, not filling it through. The other materials are thread, yarn, some plaster and quartz crystals.

eeptomon: What were you thinking when you made this piece?

Jaz: I'm not sure... the whole thing was based on a small sketch I made. It was a of very delicate looking torso with over sized hair, half the face missing, and crystals inside. The name Geode is literal. A cracked open exterior that reveals crystals inside.

eeptomon: Interesting. It is almost a play of beauty, softness, but very grotesque in some ways. It's an amalgamation of many things.

Jaz: Grotesque is accidental but tends to show up a lot.

eeptomon: haha

Jaz: I made the inside hot pink because I didn't want red, since red would be too gory. But the hot pink still reads as red, unfortunately. Maybe I should have just made it all white, but I wanted there to be a contrast between the white and ivory exterior and colourful interior.

eeptomon: I would say that when I looked at your sculpture work, there are certainly some influences. Even though if you say that your 3D is different than your 2D I can see that your illustrator work, at least the colour that you use, does translate into your 3D objects. It's very pastel. Why pastel?

Jaz: I think people don't really think about colours. They just like them. ...You know Misaki?

eeptomon: Yea she was the photographer you introduced me to when we were walking around East Village that time?

Jaz: Yeah! So Misaki was shooting a portrait of me for her project, and while she was

shooting it, she was making a joke that I was the same colour as my artwork... and I knew that was sort of true. People usually do resemble their own work. But when I actually saw her end photo, it was amazing how dead on the colours of my hair, skin, and shirt were to the artwork directly behind me. It was like a pantone colour match and I didn't even realize it.

eeptomon: On your Facebook banner photo, is that you hanging? Who took that picture?



Jaz: That was my project, in a sense that I was the one who wanted to do it, sketched it, and asked my friend Holly to be the only other person involved. Because I wanted to keep the photo project small scale. Otherwise, well at least for me, I get annoyed that you have to depend on five people to come through. Two out of the five phone it in and then the whole thing suffers for it. So I did it with just one other person. I could do almost all of it myself. I had very detailed sketches of the styling, hair and makeup and Holly did the execution. Holly is a hair and make up artist. The end result was the two pictures, one with her as the model and other is me as the model. We took turns taking each other's photos. I went to Connecticut where she lives and we actually set up a clothes line. While it is Photoshopped, a lot of it is real. There was actually a clothes line, and we were pinned to it. That was last Fall.

But you know it is funny. It goes through phases which are visible in that exact way. A year or a little less before that I did another personal photo project that was six images. That time three people were involved, me, Holly and my friend Tracy.

eeptomon: It's better if it's smaller. More manageable that way.

Jaz: But in that case I was going through a long phase where everything was really desaturated. My clothes were desaturated, my whole apartment was grey, and the whole photo shoot was very pale blue-grey, with a few light pinks mixed into it. I think that anything that I'm doing, I do to everything.

eeptomon: Again... why the pastel colours? What gets you connected to them?

Jaz: I guess that they are just soft and innocent and cute looking. But I don't know if there is that much logic... when I was in the desaturated phase, it was because I didn't have to put the effort into matching things. If everything is grey, everything matches. Nothing is too loud.

It's also the fabric, I've been working with fabric and yarn recently.

eeptomon: Yea tell me about that!

Jaz: Even the last project I worked on, it's a hanging moon with layers of clouds and below is layers of waves. It didn't need to be sewn because it's not a malleable plush... none of it is stuffed but everything is covered in fabric because I like how fabric absorbs the light. Fabric makes everything look softer. Even if you don't touch it, it doesn't have to feel soft but it just looks soft. (Jaz shows me an image of her photo on her mobile device)

eeptomon: Let me see here... Yes there are indeed a lot of layers.

Jaz: Yeah, the canvas is an eight inch deep box that is also covered in fabric.

eeptomon: So when did you start using fabric into your work?

Jaz: Well I sewed a bunch of stuffed animals for a while during my senior year in college. Those are okay but...

eeptomon: ... I'd say that is where it all started for you.

Jaz: That's when I started sewing more but at some point I realized that I liked to use it as a sculpture in the end.

eepmon: While they are pastel colours, plush fabric takes it to another level of expressing a sense of innocence don't you think?

Jaz: Yeah but it's nice that if you do that, then anything else you do is softened. So you know I have that 5x7 foot piece on my wall that has boobs all over it, but they don't seem sexual or perverted whatsoever. They are soft and cuddly.

eepmon: That's right. On the topic of your large piece. What got you started with this installation?



Jaz: Actually I ended up doing that piece because I've been drawn in by certain fiber art I've seen. The ones that have yarn that is layered, textured and dripping down. I think those are really cool. Looking at those I wanted to something like that, maybe a combination of that and fabric. I was sketching a composition that I would like and then figuring out the material. Getting a lot of samples and figuring out which ones I liked.

eepmon: I assume it would be very process driven right? You have to sample the material, sketch it out, trial and error with what works and what doesn't...

Jaz: Yeah, well what takes the longest is not the prep though... the prep was pretty easy as I already had a pretty good idea of what I wanted. Samples aren't so hard because you order a lot. You order more than you need and then you narrow down to what you want. What takes the longest? I don't know how many little balls are in there... I'd guess a thousand... so it's the cutting up the circles, sewing the circles... each one is really simple but there are so many of them... that what takes the longest.

eepmon: Your next piece, the one that was pictured next to your large installation was in a recent exhibition. Where was this?



Jaz: It was at Toy Tokyo Underground. 1st Ave and 5th Street NYC.

eepmon: Explain what that piece was about?

Jaz: The exhibition was "Buddy's Den," it's supposed to be fantasy Taxidermy. Not your standard taxidermy, more like mythical creatures, or something along those lines, that Buddy had captured in his travels. Or for a 2D artist it would be photo mementos from Buddy's travels. I went this route because I had an obsession with Greek Mythology when I was younger. I was really nerdy about it. So I created The Queen of the Harpies, based on the harpies in Greek Mythology.

eepmon: What inspires you? What makes you do what you do? Influences?

Jaz: Well I obsessively save images that I find and like. If I have a moment where I'm looking for an idea for something I'd flip through whatever is saved on my computer. Tons of files, and lots of folders.

eepmon: A digital mood board.

Jaz: Basically, but I rarely have to look at that... I usually have a sketch book that I use to jot down ideas. By the time I get a chance to start a new project I've got 10 lined up and ready to go and I pick the one that is strongest. I have a lot of time where I'm already working on a project, but I'm thinking about new ones. It's bad to divide my attention too much, so I just jot it down into my sketch book for later. So it's been a long time since I waited for inspiration for something. Even the last one I did was based off a sketch I did at least a year ago.

eepmon: Japanese pop culture influences your work?

Jaz: I very much like that for what it is. A lot of it I don't think I can draw from directly because... well take for example Rilakkuma (famous Japanese bear cartoon). I love Rilakkuma... really I have this weird obsession with him and I own everything he markets. But... I would never make a character like Rilakkuma because he is more marketing genius than anything else. He's just something that translates really well into many products and is cute, adorable, and he has a very simple personality that sells well. But I cannot make something like that. He's not actually a strong idea, he is just great marketing.

eepmon: I see.

Jaz: Still I love that... and while I might take small inspiration from aspects of it... the idea as a whole can't transfer over because it's needs to be used by a certain person in a certain

way. But there are definitely Japanese artists that I love. Yayoi Kusama is touring the world right now which is the most exciting thing ever! I can't wait until she is in New York.

eepmon: She's going to come here soon?

Jaz: Her works are going to be at the Whitney.

eepmon's note: Yayoi Kusama's exhibition at the Whitney runs until September 30th, 2012

eepmon: Retrospective?

Jaz: Her retrospective has been already traveling the world and we are at the end of the list in her itinerary!

eepmon: That's surprising, I thought New York would be a main destination of her work.

Jaz: I think she is bigger in the East and Europe than she is here.

eepmon: I've seen her work certainly in Tokyo at the Mori Art Museum... but I thought she would be more...

Jaz: She lived in New York for a while too. Certainly people here who appreciate Modern Art will know her, for sure. But in terms of Pop Culture in America, the people who aren't into Contemporary Art don't know her. Anyway I'm so excited!

eepmon: Tell me some pieces that you like from her work.

Jaz: I really like her fabric works... not surprising. Also her piece Fireflies on the Water. Looks like fireflies into infinity. Last time I was in Japan there was a small retrospective of hers somewhere in Aoyama, Tokyo. They had a small room with an installation of her larger white and red polka dot pieces. That was good, but I felt the original one would have been better. The ones I don't like as much are the ones with the pumpkins and flowers... They're still nice but I find the installations are more interesting.

eepmon: Interesting. So what's next? Any new projects coming up?

Jaz: Currently I'm working on some resin bracelets both to sell and as a personal project. The first prototype is multicoloured, pastel, soft-resin boobs with cherry blossom claps on the end.

eepmon: haha

Jaz: And if that goes well I'll do different variations and maybe have one that's entirely cherry blossoms. I do want to do another cast face sculpture. I have a good sketch but I'm not sure if I want to use myself again or find the right model. And I really want to do an installation of cherry blossoms. I have a drawing for how it will look installed, and have around 100 cherry blossoms made thus far to go into it. But for the actual installation I would need at least twice as many. Before making them I am looking for the right venue to show it.



eepmon: Any last words?

Jaz: Everyone can and should form their own ideas and find your own voice. With time, the goal is self discovery and finding what is true to yourself. I don't think anyone is going to be that interested if you are looking for what people are interested in already. Artists should create. People should not get stuck doing something because they've done it before and it was successful. Some artists end up making the same painting their entire life, and maybe it never stops selling and it makes a great career but... it's sad for them if it could have

developed into something more, but they got stuck for the sake of money in one place.

eepmo: That's true. That is something that we as artists have to look at our past, internalize it and ask ourselves what we do to push ourselves further and grow from that...

Jaz: I think it's a great thing that every five years you hate what you did five years ago. That just means you've grown! Haha.

eepmo: But what if someone comes up to you and says, "Hey I really like this style and I want to commission you a large sum of money" But it's a piece that you've created awhile back and you feel you've moved beyond it?

Jaz: I mean unless I desperately need that money, I'll either A) try to find the happy middle ground, combining what they like about the piece with things I like now or B) pass on the job and use the time to create work on my own.

eepmo: Very insightful. Well I am looking forward to your new creations Jaz. I want to see your install works in it's entirety! Thank you for your time.

Jaz: For sure! Thank you.

More at *Jaz Harold*.

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In conversation with EEPMON: Shimpei



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IN CONVERSATION WITH EEPMON: PAUL BUDNITZ, MULTIDISCIPLINARY CREATOR / SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR

by eepmon / August 23, 2012

Often portrayed in the press as a renaissance man, Paul Budnitz is an author, artist, photographer, filmmaker, designer and serial entrepreneur. Budnitz is perhaps best known as the founder of Kidrobot, the world's premiere creator of art toys. He is also the founder of specialty bicycle company Paul Budnitz Bicycles. We got down and chatted it up over Skype.

Paul: Hey there!

eepmon: Hello hello! How are you doing?

Paul: Good. Thanks for doing the interview. Eric, I really love your work!

eepmon: Well, thank you very much, Paul. Crazy timing because Nick and I so happened to have coffee at Ground Support. He started talking about what you were doing.

Paul: Yeah.

eepmon: Excellent. So let's get started for our readers, please introduce yourself.

Paul: This is Paul Budnitz

eepmon: The theme of MOCO LOCO x eepmon is "Multidisciplinary". I think it's fitting that you would be included in this feature. But let's go back a bit. You were quite the technologist back then, am I right? In school you initially were into Computer Programming? Engineering?

Paul: That was when I was in high school and then in college. I was a computer geek as a kid. So I was programming computers back when personal computers were just getting started.

eepmon: Incredible.

Paul: I was writing engineering software for nuclear power plants.

eepmon: What!

Paul: When the Commodore 64 came out, they grab a bunch of us working on games...

eepmon: Commodore 64, that's sometime ago!

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Paul: It was very exciting at the time, you know?

eepmon: So you are technologically savvy, and I would therefore say that Japan appeared to play a strong influence on your entrepreneurial career. To start off, Minidisco. What was this about?

Paul: I was shooting film, writing scripts partially for a living. Making my own movies, getting awards at film festivals, but just discovering that small films don't really make you much money, but it was really a blast.

eepmon: Right.

Paul: To do sound recording, I hacked my own video editing system using a MAC in QuickTime 1. This back when systems were 100,000's of dollars to edit video on a computer, and we were actually shooting in film. I had a 16mm most of the time, so I started recording sound on MiniDiscs and we also started hacking up our own microphones which we were using, so we could record and not have to worry about permits and stuff like that. So I was bringing all these MiniDisc players and selling these special microphones... cutting them and fitting them into eyeglass cases... we'd hide microphones in headphones so it would look like you were listening to music, but you are actually recording everything around you. We started selling this out of the garage and with a computer program I wrote... this was, I think, in '97, right when the Internet was emerging and it grew into a bigger business. Which has kinda always been my pattern, I go into something I really love and it accidentally seems to turn into a larger business. Then I get frantic working on it for quite awhile and realize... hahaha

eepmon: haha!

Paul: ... I don't like being part of a big business so I sell them and do something else.

Wow, incredible. So with Minidisco you actually hacked them, right? You actually opened them up, reconfigured, you programmed and did a whole bunch of stuff didn't you?

Paul: You couldn't get or go back/forth with the files on a MiniDisc because Sony had locked it. So we unlocked it.

eepmon: You know this is a side of you I never knew. You are totally into computers and technology. That's pretty amazing.

Paul: I'm not doing that type of thing as much now.

eepmon: I'm sure a lot of your computer background has certainly trickled into your other careers...

Paul: Actually for Budnitz Bicycles I wrote the whole backend that runs the whole company, which we can put more investment into the bikes because we have a low overhead. We can talk with the people who work with us, and keep track of everything by using the software I wrote. The same was originally true with Kidrobot, I even wrote the original cash register systems for that company. At first it was like, oh this saves us, but actually to me it is part of the aesthetic exercise of the whole project.

eepmon: RIGHT! Totally agree with that!

Paul: I need to control the whole experience so the customer gets a remarkable product, that is what makes these things beautiful. To me, the whole company is the work of art, not just the things that we are creating and selling.

eepmon: I totally respect that because for me as eepmon I can relate to what you're saying. You know, I'm an artist, freelancer, a bit of an entrepreneur myself...

Paul: Eric, you have REALLY beautiful work... you know, your lines are so clean.

eepmon: Thank you very much. And I try to keep it a tight ship too, you know. I also graduated in Computer Science and with my programming background I also coded the eepmon store, eepmon website and I try to do everything myself because it is like your baby... and as a brand you want to have as much control as possible to ensure that you have it all locked down to your vision.

Paul: Totally.

eepmon: So I can really relate to what you are saying. We are certainly going to get to the Budnitz Bicycles in a second, but let's jump into Kidrobot.

Paul: OK.

Recommendations



Behind the Scenes: Rubens Cantuni

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eepmoN: You were the founder of Kidrobot. What did you see at the time that Hong Kong and Japan were doing that really inspired you to kick start that?

Paul: I have always been a comic book freak. Especially independent comic books which were really big in the '80s and into the '90s. So I was winding down Minidisco, it was Greg Blum and Jim Crawford who were working with me then and actually ended up founding Strangeco. I think Greg brought in a toy from Michael Lau into the office. I thought it was the coolest I had ever seen! My next trip to Hong Kong, I started exploring. You know there weren't very many art toys being made. There were a few artists doing it and what they were doing were mostly taking GI:Joes, chopping their heads off...

eepmoN: haha!

Paul: ... and molding new ones and selling them at comic book and toy conventions in China. Or in basements in these weird little stores in these weird little crazy run down malls they have in Kowloon.

eepmoN: Yea. It's the the real deal there!

Paul: I thought... this stuff is amazing! And then I went to Japan and was like... this stuff is amazing, too! It was really a subculture even there. I said to myself, man, I really gotta do this! We started doing our own toys and opened the first Kidrobot shop in San Francisco and moving between there and New York where we opened another shop. I started making toys with a lot of friends and friends of friends. Tristan Eaton introduced me to a lot of street artists and I'd known a few. It opened a lot of doors for me. I just fell in love with street artists as people at that point especially most were doing their work for no money...

eepmoN: Of course.

Paul: ... taking personal risks. Getting arrested, beat up. When you get that passion in your work, often the result is really remarkable.

eepmoN: Yeah.

Paul: I decided to started to work with street artists first and created Kidrobot. It was sort of my aesthetic combined with hundreds of people's work, that is why Kidrobot's art looks consistent. But I was working with the greatest artists and designers in the world so making great work wasn't so hard.

eepmoN: Everyone applied their passion and their artistic style. A lot of it on the Munnies, right?

Paul: Yeah...

eepmoN: And you have done many collaborations under the Kidrobot brand.

How was it like working with eBoy, Jon Burgerman, Junko Mizuno... how was it working with these guys?

Paul: 90% of the time it was very easy. In general, because it's a weird medium and we would tell artists, "you're not going to make your living off toys, take a risk." That was great because we just let the artist just go to town, for better or for worse. Usually better. And sometimes it was a problem just had to make a certain toy, even if we are selling at a loss because it's just too amazing.

And yeah, sometimes people are assholes. Sometimes there are prima donnas and egos get involved but, in general, I didn't work with those people twice. It is just too exhausting. For example, I'd say Frank Kozik is very successful because he's actually one of the nicest people I know and he is also one of the most professional artists I know. You can call Frank and say, "Frank, we need this drawing by tomorrow," and he'd say, "No problem," and he'd be staying up all night doing it and it'd be ready the next day.

eeomon: Absolutely agree. Talent is one thing, I also believe that a person as a human being... no ego driven, open-minded. Because in the grand scheme of things, the ego doesn't achieve anything, doesn't add any value to your career, persona... So I find it funny sometimes that I bump into people with this vibe and I'm like... "Are you kidding me?"

Paul: It's offensive.

eeomon: If they are a really genuinely nice person, I think attitude goes a long way in making an all-around artist.

Paul: It just makes things easier.

eeomon: Of course.

Paul: I used to spend a lot of time telling people I was fairly talentless, actually. Haha, and I know that a lot of artists that I worked with would agree, ... but actually over time I realized that it's not true. I have a very exceptionally good eye. But there are a lot of things that I'm not the best at, but at some point you learn, "Oh! If I'm not the best at these things, but I have a good eye... then I can work with the people who are the best in their world. They'll respect me because I understand why their work is so remarkable and I can help them to make their work even more.

That's the thing, what we are inside is sort of irrelevant if we can show a way that we can be useful and make things work, you know?

eeomon: Yes. You were mentioning earlier if you don't have that part of that skill set... then you know that I can work with people who are good at that. So you know, it's about matching that vision, it's like associating your brand with them because you guys understand the logistics, you understand what quality is...

Paul: Yeah.

eeomon: ... What refinement is, you know... so it's very important to have that eye and to look for these people to pair up with. Very important.

Paul: Since the Internet came, we all became brands. Everybody's a brand. So if we think about our disabilities, things that we are not good at, then we can just ask someone to help me out. I think that kind of compensation has turned to an advantage for me. If I can look for people who can do what I cannot... and bring them in and ask them very politely. I think there is certainly a lot of space for success there.



eeomon: With those collaborations, you've also written books. I Am Plastic. It

must have been an ambitious endeavour to research and build a comprehensive list of designer vinyls and collectibles. How did you manage about doing this?

Paul: I think I just said I wanted to make a book and then I approached Abrams who I believe made the best art books around and they said ok and gave us an advance and we spent the money making the book. I learned that the amount of money that you make from the book is exactly your advance!

We did a second one and then a kids' one with Aya Kakeda, which was really great. Now I'm working on a book for adults.

eepmon: A bit more on that, what is this about?

Paul: I had this idea that I should write a book that would be about what I do creatively, so that people can learn to work the way I do, I got partway through and realized that I'm sort of insane! I'm way too crazy to be able to communicate how I work in a useful way. So it's becoming more a book about using your disabilities to your advantage. I have Asperger syndrome, which is a kind of autism. So I've had to compensate for that.

eepmon: We're all crazy, are we not? Well, a saying from Steve Jobs, I believe he said it on All Things D, was that rational, normal people would be smart not to even try to attempt such a task because it is insane.

Paul: Exactly. It's sort of the same thing of saying about if you're a jerk, just keep being a jerk but you don't have to act like one. If you have a disability, it can make certain things incredibly difficult, but instead of worrying about it, just figure how to ask for help. Make things work.



eepmon: Let's jump to today. You are starting a completely new venture. A shift away from vinyl toy market and into bicycles. These are certainly no ordinary bicycles. How did it all start?

Paul: I've been biking for years. When we were still living in New York City, my weekend way to relax was to take my bike and ride it up all the way to the George Washington Bridge from the Village, where I lived and then ride back down Manhattan, down Broadway as fast as possible in traffic.

eepmon: Wow. Traffic here is something not to be messed with.

Paul: I never really could find a bicycle that I really wanted or loved and always wanted to make my own. I started making my own bikes and people kept wanting to buy them.

eepmon: The idea of you building... That spanned all the way since high school when you were building things for the Commodore 64. This trickles into what you today - it's amazing!

Paul: I guess you're right! Yeah, I didn't really think about it...

eepmon: Yes, stuff that caters to your taste, you know? It can only be customized.

Paul: Every detail has to be right... Kidrobot was also a way for me to make things just perfect. These bikes are immaculate. We make our own frames, handle bars, stems, seat posts that are titanium. Now we have cro-moly steel bikes too.

Next week we are introducing a few new colours. They are really beautiful. We are making city bikes not racing bikes. We are making bikes for everyday use because I believe that bikes are really transformational when you start shifting to them as your main mode of transportation.

eepmo: Right.

Paul: You can get anywhere you want real fast on a bicycle. But to me they had to be beautiful too. I got invited to a reception at the French Embassy in Paris, so I made one for that and that is now called the Honey Edition.



eepmo: By looking at these bikes, I see your meticulous attention to quality. Attention to detail, craft on every single piece. Yes. The Honey Edition really caught my eye. I really like this one.

Paul: Thank you. We are using belts instead of chains because I hate getting dirty. Also we only sell direct. I refuse to wholesale, which means for the same price, you are getting a bike that is 5x as good as a similarly priced at a bike shop.



eepmo: Right. If you don't mind me asking, where are the parts being sourcing from? What place / country?

Paul: The chromoly frames are made in Washington State. Our hubs are made in California. Our brake arms are made here in Denver. We have our painting done here in Colorado. The tires are German, and the reaction cable housing is made in Japan.

People look at our bike sometimes and have a lot of opinions, of course, like, "I can pick these things up for \$300!" I'm like, yeah, right! haha... and btw, I love \$300 bikes. I love flea market bikes. Some of them are tremendous.

eepmo: I see that totally.

Paul: Kidrobot was about making limited editions... a lot of things that were made in a lot of different ... stuff released over and over. With the bicycles I thought, what if I made a company where every model was perfected before I put it out? I wanted to make models that were classic, that were simple and that would look good for decades. In 10 years from now, a Budnitz Model number 1 is going to look like a number 1 and we will still be selling it.

eepmo: Certainly. I see this as a work of art.

Paul: Thank you.



eeomon: That is exactly why I wanted to ask you where most of these parts are being sourced from because it's important. Having not met you personally I can tell already you are careful about the sourcing. It does play a role in establishing your vision and the aesthetic of the bike itself.

Paul: Totally.

eeomon: You're making sure you are getting the best of the best.

Paul: Yes and in every case.

eeomon: How many years have you been developing Budnitz Bicycles?

Paul: I've been working on them for about four years now.

eeomon: I can tell that you put in a lot of passion and care into the bicycles itself. Pretty amazing.

Paul: Thank you.

eeomon: You're welcome. Future plans with Budnitz Bicycles? What are your plans down the road?

Paul: We are currently looking for a store in New York City.

eeomon: Nick Santora mentioned about that and I suggested that you guys should hit up Monocle.

Paul: We love Monocle! But I can't get through to Monocle. Do you know anybody there?

eeomon: I don't know. The Monocle shop in New York... I think you've probably seen this too, but they have their Monocle bike in front of their store.

Paul: For sure. I am a big fan of Monocle.

eeomon: They are certainly on brand.

Paul: Totally.

eeomon: When I was in Tokyo last April, I checked out the Monocle Café in the Hankyu Men's department in Ginza.

Paul: Yeah, right?!

eeomon: ...and I walked in there and I was like..."Are you kidding me?"

Paul: It's crazy! Hahah

eeomon: The magazine is well done and that vision translated into a physical space is quite a feat.

Paul: They have a clear strong vision, you know?

My ideal thing is our own little shop where I can create the whole environment. At the same time, there is no rush. It will be a slow evolution.

eeomon: Well, that covers my questions to you. Thank you, Paul for taking your time with this interview.

Paul: Thank you, Eric!

More at *Budnitz Bicycles* and *Paul Budnitz*.