

Artists Anonymous: Divide and Conquer



“We are the actors not the artists.” –Artist’s Anonymous

Whenever I write a catalogue essay, I’ll usually interview the artists, grasp the body of work so well – I can see it naked – and find a narrative of the show (and if not, make something up).

But this time around, I got to interview War.

Indeed, War the person.

← **ArtStars***

If you met War on the street, what would you ask him?

He’s not a member of the Taliban or the former president of the United States.

I interviewed War, the man posing in the six paintings here – over Skype, from England to Germany.

Just as Neptune was sculpted by Bernini, or Venus was painted by Botticelli, the German-British art collective Artists Anonymous painted War the human in a series of three works from 2009, each with their afterimage.

War is not wearing a bulletproof vest, or a mask. He is not made of stone, but flesh like you and I.

In a pair of rolled-up jean shorts, a beer belly and mouth agape, he’s surrounded by the finer things in life – beautiful velvet curtains, antique teapots and glowing candle chandeliers.

On Skype, War has a loud British accent, grey head shaved; long black lashes and a soft, wistful smile.

He’s into lush cardigans from Marks & Spencer.

The second he appears on the screen, he is immediately upset. The video camera on my laptop wasn’t working. That made him angry.

“You can see me but I can’t see you,” said War. “That isn’t fair.”

It all started in 2005, in the Berlin neighborhood of Neukölln.

Artists Anonymous held a three-day private performance in a three-bedroom apartment studio on Stuttgarterstrasse.

Inside, they each got one room to confront their demons: One dealt with War. It’s who you see in the painting before you.

And an interview with War is a quick lesson in political science.

When asked why he enjoys killing so many people, he swears he has never killed anyone. People, after all, kill each other.

“You can’t blame Stalin or Hitler,” he says. “It’s just a social construct.”

“As long as I live in a world which is based entirely on power, then given the choice, I’ll be in the most powerful position possible which I am.”

He eats cake for breakfast, and he loves his son, Peace.

He won’t reveal his favorite war, but we can guess.

“The art world is a part of the entertainment industry, and the entertainment industry is a tool of war,” he says.

“If I give up my position as War, someone else will come along and kill me.”

-Nadja Sayej

One Shot opens at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice, Oct. 1, 2011.

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