



Rene Lynch and Julian Jackson - Artist2Artist - Leah Oates

LO: Please explain your works.

Rene Lynch: My oil paintings and watercolors reflect my interest in the manipulations of desire and the desirability inherent in the age of adolescence, the moment of balance between innocence and experience. That powerful and vulnerable stage of life full of sexual and intellectual yearning, when a child begins to break free and begins to desire, like in Alice in Wonderland, to see what is beyond the looking glass. It is a moment of life framed with edges of beauty and cruelty, luxury and anxiety.

Julian Jackson: I am a painter working with oil colors, either on wood panels that I fabricate or on a canvas for large-scale work. My work is abstract and focused on a subtle and intense experience of light, color and atmosphere. I am interested in the shared appreciation of purely visual phenomena, the ways in which what we see affects who we are. Painting is slow and helps me see more deeply.

LO: When did you know you were an artist, what is your background?

JJ: I was drawn to art early in my life. My parents would often take the family to a nearby art museum after church on Sunday, give us a time to reconvene and then set us free. I knew right away that I preferred the silent strangeness of art to that of God. I later found out that I had an uncle who was a painter living in New York. It seemed like a good ambition.

RL: I grew up in a small farming town in Illinois. I knew I wanted to be an artist since I was a very wee person. At four or five years of age my favorite activity, when I wasn't daydreaming in the backyard, was drawing at the kitchen table. I created my own studio in the basement of our house when I was about eight and was very serious about working there. I was also rather secretive about what I did in that space. I came from a big family and art making allowed me my own private world, separate from my older siblings. In high school, I spent every free hour in the art room and my parents also took me to museums in Chicago, Philadelphia and etc. But, still, by the time I went off to art school

at Virginia Commonwealth University, it was a big shock to my parents that I wanted to pursue a serious art career.

LO: Both of you are represented by German galleries. What do you think are the differences between the European and New York art markets? Arts communities? Gallery scenes?

RL: I have shown in Germany several times since I first had a residency there in 2003: at my gallery Galerie Kaysser in Munich, art fairs and the contemporary art museum, Haus der Kunst. I think the German art world is, in general, more scholarly and more formal than the American art world, which tends to emphasize the personality cult. In Germany, critics, art historians and gallerists are always giving speeches at opening receptions. In general, conversation is very focused on discussing the artwork rather than on the market. It's rather intoxicating for an artist to be given such strong intellectual attention.

JJ: We live in a very global time. Places and practices have developed similarities all over. The gallery scene in Berlin or Munich would be very familiar to any New York-based artist. There is a mix of good and bad, high and low. Berlin is lively, full of inexpensive studio space and has attracted a lot of artists who are living and working there. Munich is smaller and its importance is still developing. It has wonderful museums, some excellent galleries and a very good art school. The scene there is a very active and growing one at the moment. In Germany, as it is here, the art market has become driven to some extent by the art fair cycle, with fairs in Berlin, Cologne, Düsseldorf and, of course, Basel is not far away. Galleries all over are grappling with ways to negotiate the influence of the fairs. One positive difference in the German art scene is the seriousness of interest in the art itself. Viewers here view with an intensity that one could link to their deep appreciation of scholarship, culture and context.

LO: Do you have any advice for artists who would like to show in Europe?

RL: Go to the countries you are interested in and visit the galleries and smaller museums. Get to know artists from other countries and apply for international residency fellowships.

JJ: Seek out residencies there. In addition to being excellent working experiences, residencies are a great way to meet other artists and discover galleries that may be sympathetic to your vision. We have found that in Europe fellow artists can be wonderfully generous and inclusive, more interested in sharing opportunities than protecting them.

LO: You have been both artists and a couple for over twenty years and share a studio space. Any advice for artists couples on surviving the art world, managing your ego and being polite in close working conditions?

JJ: It works well for us because our work has always been very different and we are very supportive of each other. The most important thing I have learned over the years is to keep my critical trap shut unless invited. Every artist needs to preserve a little personal space for working where they can fuck up and figure things out on their own. We are alert to each other's need for that.

RL: It is for me quite wonderful to have an artist partner. Though our work is very different, he understands me, my late night work habits and the tyranny of deadlines. If I have a show coming up he is very supportive with framing assistance and taking on the lion's share of domestic tasks. When he has a show deadline I do the same for him...if we both do, we make friends with a bit of chaos and take-out food! As for egos, it's healthy to have a cheerleader there for you when you're having doubts, and to have a critical eye you can trust for feedback. Our work is so different we never find ourselves competing for the same awards, shows or collectors, so professional jealousy has never been part of our equation. We did have a wonderful exhibit together this winter at Galerie Kaysser of simultaneous solo shows, and we were pleased to see how our work did have a conversation from their adjoining galleries.

LO: You both run a successful gallery in Brooklyn called Metaphor Contemporary Art. When did you think to open a gallery and why? What was the model you conceived of for Metaphor?

RL: We both curated and directed the gallery of an artist's space called R.A.W. in Richmond, Virginia after art school. Off and on I curated at nonprofits and universities before we opened Metaphor in 2001. Our main interest in running a gallery is the social sculpture, a term coined by the artist-visionary Joseph Bueys. We love all the interconnections that continually revolve about the gallery: artists meeting each other and exchanging ideas, discussing politics, laughs and opportunities. Though we've occasionally delved into these activities in the past, in 2007 Metaphor is morphing into a cultural space that goes beyond a white box for the pristine presentation of visual art. We are developing several new ongoing programs that will present artists talks and panels, film and video programs, book and poetry readings, performance and music, partnering with other cultural and literary institutions.

JJ: Metaphor has been an adventure. I think it grew out of our shared interest in locating

context for our own work. For some time, we had each collaborated on independent curatorial projects for various spaces framing Zeitgeist issues and themes of interest to us that were engaging other artists as well. In 2001 the time felt right and we decided to open a space of our own. The model is a work in progress. Our main interest has been and remains a desire to contribute to the cultural conversation of our time and place. To add something to the mix. To us a gallery is a social sculpture where people and ideas converge.

LO: Why did you decide to live, work and open Metaphor in Brooklyn, as opposed to, for instance, Chelsea?

JJ: Rene and I are artists first and gallerists second. A move to Chelsea would have reversed that equation I think and maybe changed it entirely. As it is, we are very happy with the scale of our operation. We've been able to remain focused on the content and quality of our exhibitions while still maintaining active studio practices. As gallerists we are increasingly interested in the community component of what we do, envisioning and participating in growth and change in our own neighborhood. Brooklyn is where the artists live and is an amazing incubator. There is more space for us.

RL: We chose to pioneer in a location outside of the mainstream of the Chelsea gallery district physically but not aesthetically. We are instead located in a diverse neighborhood in Brooklyn that is full of creative people, well known writers, filmmakers and artists as well as novice cultural viewers, all of whom we endeavor to make welcome at our table. Though Atlantic Avenue in Boerum Hill is a vibrant neighborhood, we are off the beaten path as far as galleries go. For this reason, our visitors take time to view the work we present—they are not rushing through so they can see 12 more shows that day. We are a destination for them. They slow down and breathe for a while. It takes a long time for an artist to make a work of art, and I think it should be given more than a nanosecond of time for viewing.

LO: What do you think is the difference, if there is any, of artists running a gallery? I think that it's a very generous gesture and is more like a colleague helping a colleague because they admire their work and both benefit. What are your thoughts on this?

RL: We have no interest in representing our own art at Metaphor and are represented by other galleries.

As for our curatorial life, at Metaphor, we are interested in a more transparent relationship with the artists our gallery represents and the collectors who support us. We enjoy speaking with viewers at length about the work and this encourages a dialogue about ideas and concepts and a context for viewers that fosters a conscious and engaged response.

I believe artists who are also curators present art from a deep perspective based on knowledge of the practice and motivation of making art. I have noticed that there are two kinds of artists: those who only appreciate work that is related to their own, such as Ad Reinhardt made clear in his hilarious cartoons, lampooning his contemporaries, and those who have a more diverse taste, even appreciating art that is quite opposite to their own. I have always been in the later camp. I have often curated exhibits of work that is far different to my own but with which I feel a deep intellectual or spiritual appreciation. I find this a liberating aspect to running a gallery, a release valve to the insularity that comes with constant involvement in my private world of my studio. I find it inspiring, mind expanding and a challenge to present other visions, akin to traveling to another country where you don't speak the language fluently. Curating can be viewed as a large conceptual art project, as the editing and presentation of a larger idea that moves out and beyond our own studio walls. I have found an outlet in curating exhibits on war, the environment, biotechnology, et cetera, to fulfill the need for me to address certain contemporary concerns that interest me that my own painting does not, except in an oblique way.

JJ: Artists approach curating from the inside out, close to subject and close to process. Rene and I have a wide range of interests which we bring to bear on our curatorial process. You have to love art and be able to see beyond your own work to broader context. Working in the arts is, for most of us, a labor of love. Nothing's guaranteed. Generosity is a good starting point for art. If we can keep going we're happy. If we can benefit an artist who deserves attention, more so.

LO: Do you think that the art world is too market driven? What do you think about the proliferation of art fairs?

JJ: The market is a powerful drug. Everybody wants a piece of pie. The fact that the current bull market in art is coinciding with a wide open, pluralistic critical moment opens the possibility of sales activity for more artists, probably, than ever before, which is good for artists, certainly. More voices, more activity, more interest. Whether it will last and what the fallout will be? Let's talk again in five years. The art fair cycle has definitely accelerated the pressure of market forces and is, I think, taking its' toll on

incubator galleries like ours who feel the pressure to participate. The risk to reward ratio is very hard on small galleries especially as the number of satellite fairs surrounding the larger fairs (and the sheer number of fairs) spirals exponentially. There's lots of money out there but more of it seems to be moving upward as the fair phenomenon matures. The organizers of fairs always make money. It can be harder on the galleries with travel and whopping expenses. The atmosphere of fairs is manic. Fun, but not the best way to see, or show, art. People forget what they see.

RL: When representing our gallery artists at art fairs, though we are happy for their exposure and sales, we are put off by the circus atmosphere and wallmart like aspect to art viewed chock'o'block crammed together in small booths and hotel rooms. As an artist represented at art fairs by my own galleries, I'm well aware how expensive and difficult it is to participate for the gallery. In general I have an insiders point of view on all sorts of the managerial difficulties of running a gallery...so I bring a realistic perspective to my relationship with the galleries that show me.

LO: Who are your favorite artists and why?

RL: I take a collagist's approach to creating my figures and images and I feel my work has a strong relationship to contemporary photographers who create elaborate set-up shots and digitally manipulated images that come off as "natural" portraits. Artist photographers such as Rineke Dijkstra, Loretta Lux, Katy Grannan, and Hellen Van Meene. All women who are mining the mysterious inner life of the child and or adolescent.

As a painter, my concerns are reflected in my love of Holbein, and Cranach the Elder, for their economical approach to the figure, the light of Vermeer and Luc Tuymans, the subtle stylizations of Inges, the psychological curiosities of Neo Rausch and Balthus, Egon Schiele's line and sexual energy, and Frida Kahlo's lush directness. The flattened and dramatic landscapes of Edo period Japanese screen paintings as well as the austerity of American folk paintings of children are both influential in my compositions.

JJ: My favorite artists are those who know themselves and make the work they need to make regardless.

LO: What projects are you working on in studio currently and what upcoming shows are coming up for us to see your work?

JJ: I am working toward a solo show of new paintings that will open in September of 2007 at the Kathryn Markel Gallery in Chelsea. I have also recently shown work at Galerie Kaysser in Munich, Germany, and Kenise Barnes Fine Art in Larchmont, NY.

RL: Currently I have a solo exhibit "The Secret Life of the Forest" at HPGRP Gallery NY in the meat packing district, new paintings at Jenkins Johnson in Chelsea and San Francisco and DFN Gallery in Chelsea. I am working now in the studio towards my upcoming solo at Jenkins Johnson Gallery, NY in July and a show At HPGRP Gallery in Tokyo in August. Also I am included in a show in Istanbul during the Biennial in September. My new catalogue Gaze includes essays by ArtForum editor Nicole Rudick and German critic Cornelia Kleyboldt.