



**THE EMILY
HARVEY
FOUNDATION
RESIDENCY
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29 MARCH 2010
JAMES JOHNSON-
PERKINS**



The Meeting, Gigapan, Venice, 2010



The Battle Between Good and Evil (Work in Progress), Gigapan, Venice, 2010



The White Sofa, The Isola di Sant Erasmo, Gigapan, Venice, Italy, 2010



The Dancers, Gigapan, Venice, Italy, 2010



The Dancers (Detail), Gigapan, Venice, Italy, 2010



Daddy, Gigapan, Rome, Italy, 2010



Daddy (Detail), Gigapan, Rome, Italy, 2010

THE POP MEETS THE PANORAMAS GIGAPAN

For inspiration among the narrow streets of Venice, James Johnson-Perkins, conceptual artist who Lectures at Newcastle (UK), stopped to tell readers Digimag of his residency for artists in Venice. Thanks to a scholarship from the Emily Harvey Foundation. The conversation with British video artist offers us some interesting ideas regarding possibilities for video-makers and artists in general using Gigapan technology.

Silvia Casini: First, how did you come to Venice?

James Johnson-Perkins: I'm here thanks to Emily Harvey Foundation, an American foundation that promotes and supports residencies for artists and curators. The Emily Harvey has very close relations with the Fluxus movement in New York, many artists began this movement of in the 60s-70s.

Silvia Casini: What was your goal when asked to be an artist-in-residence "In Venice? What kind of project did you present to The Emily Harvey Foundation?

James Johnson-Perkins: I showed them some of my earlier work, all about the concept of nostalgia which is linked with my interest in memory. I think I wanted to do something similar to what I had done in the past, but I used Venice to draw new life, new inspiration.

Silvia Casini: Tell us a bit 'of your previous work on robots ...

James Johnson-Perkins: All the work I have done over the past five years has looked back to the eighties as I grew up in that period. I used materials and objects that derived from my childhood, so Lego and toy soldiers, for example. I also made some movies using old computers like the Commodore 64, I used the type of graphics of the Commodore. So basically, I still use items and materials from the past in a new contemporary context.

Silvia Casini: What you say is very interesting because the robots are often associated with innovative materials and technologies in futuristic scenarios, science fiction.

James Johnson-Perkins: I think some of the things that are happening today. Internet use or Skype, experiences are very similar to things we thought would happen in the eighties. When watching old science fiction movies. These films that were made in the past. Give us the kind of experience, a look back into future, because somehow the future is already past, has passed. I think I'm mainly interested in memory and use Venice as the background of my memories - it ironic that I was making pretend robots in the past, because now I use the camera connected to a real robot capable of these amazing panoramic images...

Silvia Casini: You mean Gigapan technology ..

James Johnson-Perkins: Yes, Gigapan technology, which enables the realization of these collaged panoramic pictures.

Casini Silvia: What views of the landscape of Venice have reactivated your memories in particular?

James Johnson-Perkins: Since I arrived in Venice I was interested in Canaletto views of the Rialto bridge, and then I was thinking about television and video images of my childhood, such as images of The Lord of the Rings, so I made a composite image from these two ideas. In this image: there is "good" on one side and "bad" on the other. Basically I am mixing images from the media of the past like Doctor Who and superimposing this onto a renaissance Italian scene. Do you know DR who?

Casini Silvia: I do not know, I think not!

James Johnson-Perkins: So most of the things I used to love become sources of inspiration. The thing that interests me is that when you look at these panoramic images, they would be very large images from afar, and look like Renaissance paintings, but when you get close to look more carefully, little things, details, jump to the eye, emerge from the picture, and many of these things have international allure, like Star Wars. So when you look at the surface of these images. In the past I also used toys and things that triggered memories of other people and myself.

Silvia Casini: It 's interesting that you make the association between the concepts of past/present and distance/near in your artistic approach to your work.

James Johnson-Perkins: Yes, Its like thinking of a painting of the Renaissance, of five hundred years ago, as both a historical and contemporary image at the same time.

Silvia Casini: Gigapan technology is associated mainly Google, Street View and concepts of monitoring, almost voyeuristic. Instead, you talk about your work mainly in terms and concepts such as memory, nostalgia, play ...

James Johnson-Perkins: I like to use the latest technology. Coming to Venice gave me a great opportunity to have this background on which to place these ideas, I think for me, that Venice is inexorably linked with the history of art, here, If i were in residence in another country I wonder where this would lead.

Silvia Casini: So you're thinking of using the same technology, Gigapan, in different historical, cultural and geographical contexts?

James Johnson-Perkins: Yes. So if I went to Paris or France, I could be influenced by some ideas from the, "impressionists". I could be influenced by the landscape of the Impressionists, but again, I would place these in a modern context.

Silvia Casini: So there is an element of performance that is present in your previous work

James Johnson-Perkins: Yes, sometimes I have used performance myself. However, the main element is the dynamic relationship of magnitude because they are large pictures that these details are really small, these are pictures of people or objects, which arouses feelings.

Casini Silvia: I think it is worthwhile to underline how the viewer does not need to move with your body to get closer to the image and to be able to see the details: the viewer, in fact, can simply "zoom" with the technological support. Also your work makes me think about Chuck Close, with this ability to recognize a face, made from abstract patterns when you are at some distance from the canvas.

James Johnson-Perkins: Yes, I think it works roughly like this. These dancers are so tiny and you can zoom. I like the idea that these images are also a kind of game is a bit 'as used Where's Wally, with this little character in a tangle of happenings.

Casini Silvia: I noticed that you tend to use primary colours in your pictures.

James Johnson-Perkins: I almost always use primary colours and also in my performances, I like the idea of characters who wear strong colors, bold. They are Pop: I like things to be bright and bold.

Silvia Casini: These images ask the viewer to be looked at very carefully, and one realizes that there is something hidden in them.

James Johnson-Perkins: I have to consider whether to present these images in, shall we say "virtual" installations in physical space. In this second case the feeling when looking at the image, one may say "here's a lovely image of Venice" or "oh, this looks like a classical painting, but when you get closer, you realize that something is happening, that there's this man standing on deck, wearing a mask, or the two dancers, or a little wheelchair. And these people who lean from balconies and windows, will activate memories and thoughts ...

Silvia Casini: And the audience is free to create their own narrative threads, with their association of ideas and concepts ...

James Johnson-Perkins: In a way yes. This is the first virtual photographic work that I have worked on... I do not know, I started using titles to lead the viewer into the work, for example, the 'image of the Rialto bridge I'll call "The Battle between Good and Evil", so that when one looks at the characters appearing they also to think about the relationships between these concepts.

Casini Silvia: We started talking about enjoyment of your work and how you're considering exhibiting these images. Are you thinking about using screens and computers or would you prefer your images to be installed in a physical space?

James Johnson-Perkins: I think I'd like to use both modes of exhibition, first of all I have to retouch images, no more than eight or ten. To start with I would place them in a sort of virtual gallery, then, later, I'd put this virtual gallery in a physical space. In an exhibition, I think a number of computer terminals available, through which to explore the images would be great, and maybe even projecting these onto a giant screens. Thus, despite the virtual dimension, people could browse the image projected onto the wall. Then I'd would also like to present these images as large format photographs. The nice thing is that both methods work, and one can also see these images outside the context of the art gallery, as virtual images.

Silvia Casini: It may also be projected onto buildings in real physical places ... so the work becomes a performative intervention on urban spaces.

James Johnson-Perkins: Good idea, I haven't thought of this ...

Silvia Casini: You work with a lot with items that come from everyday life and the world of games. What is your criteria in guiding you to choosing these items?

James Johnson-Perkins: I like objects that are weird or make me laugh or have a visual impact, or things that relate to my life and my memories. When I start working on something it is because I want to create something that can be fun, something that has a pop spirit, it is not serious. I mean really that I have a policy that guides me to make my work which is accessible to the viewer.

Silvia Casini: Have you considered the possibility of reversing the procedure? That is, use landscapes, scenarios that have been important in your life, landscapes full of personal recollections and use random items within them?

James Johnson-Perkins: Strange, the other day I was talking with my artist friend that is also doing a residency here in Venice, we talked about Giorgione, the three ages of man that Giorgione represented: there is a child, an adult and old man. I think at this point in my life, I'm still looking for the child, at some point I guess I'll start looking at adult and we'll see where this will takes me! One of the things that intrigues me is starting to use slightly more obscure themes, so to speak, because my work has always been focusing on having fun and maybe as I reach the adult stage ... my work will become a bit more serious...

Silvia Casini: Actually your pictures evoke feelings of a slight discomfort, even when using cartoons ...

James Johnson-Perkins: Do you believe so? I'm glad you say that. I would like to start doing things where i am less in control and to make my work less directly about my childhood and memories.

Silvia Casini: In fact, these small figures, these characters and miniature objects have lots of different meanings ...

James Johnson-Perkins: Well, if we start with the artist who does something, then often viewer sees something else and also the critic.

Silvia Casini: Well, this is often true within Pop!

James Johnson-Perkins: Yes, and Pop art is not always carefree don't you think? When you think of Warhol and his electric chair pictures.

James Johnson-Perkins: Another thing I have been doing. An artist friend of mine, Demosthene Agrafiotis, of whom I told you before, has done some research on Giorgione and Aldo minutiae and thus came the idea that these two men have met. I liked this idea, so in collaboration we used masks and costumes to represent these people and this meeting, and made a gigapan image. 'The Meeting'. I found it interesting this idea of disguise. This is also linked to other work I've done before.

Silvia Casini: Do you usually research ideas before you create possible narratives?

James Johnson-Perkins: No, this almost never happens, as I usually work very intuitively. But for some images I often research possible places to use: for example, when I go to Rome I would love the idea of a Gigapan panorama of the Coliseum with a toy soldier, which would make a connection between contemporary soldiers and the soldiers of the past, and establish these connections. But usually still work intuitively, but I am interested the history of the places that I use as scenery.

Silvia Casini: The choice of materials that your objects are made of, is important or not? Or are the items only interesting to you for their metaphorical value, for the stories that they may contain?

James Johnson-Perkins: You can not avoid metaphors if you make art, and in my case the materials are important. Curious that you mention this, now I think. Many of these items come from my personal history: for example, my father was in the army, so i have chosen to use a soldier, so these things usually have a emotional impact on me.

Silvia Casini: Some of these objects imply a close relationship with the body. Now that I look at some examples in your collection of (you're an artist-collector!), You have something to wear (a mask), something to play with (The soldiers) and and something to eat (orange). In short, these elements are performative. My last question concerns the residence in Venice. Of course, this was a great opportunity for you, so what other plans do you have.

James Johnson-Perkins: I'd like to show these works in Venice, but since The Emily Harvey Foundation doesn't have a gallery in Venice (but has one in New York). I will have to wait until i find some way to exhibit here. But actually I'm relieved to have more time to work on images. Of course I will return here and show these images whenever possible.

Silvia Casini: What are your plans after Venice?

James Johnson-Perkins: I'm going to do another residency in Slovakia. I'm interested in thinking about the conflict between East and West: there. I will do some research, because it is a former Communist country and there is a bridge that was completely destroyed. My "artist in residence" is closely associated with this bridge. I have also thought i would like to visit some concentration camp or places, which are an important part of the history of that place ...

Silvia Casini: You're becoming serious...

James Johnson-Perkins: Yes! Probably yes! Sooner or later we all do...

Silvia Casini
Art Critic, Digimag International Magazine
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The Emily Harvey Foundation Residency, Venice, Italy



The Meeting, A collaboration with Demosthene Agrafiotis, Gigapan triptych, The Athens Photo Festival 2010

Selected Solo

2010

The Emily Harvey Foundation, Venice, Italy

Nospace, Bangkok, Thailand

The Public, West Bromwich, UK

2009

Kube Gallery, Poole, Dorset, UK

Art Gene, Barrow-in-Furnace, Cumbria, UK

DLI Musuem Gallery, Durham, UK

Tron, Glasgow, UK

2008

Nospace, Bangkok, Thailand

Exhibit Gallery, London, UK

Red Gallery, Hull, UK

2007

Waygood Gallery, Newcastle, UK

Selected Group

2010

Athens Photo Festival 10, Athens, Greece

2009

Building with Colour, Gallery North, Northumbria University, UK

Digital Showcase, Austin Museum of Digital Art, Austin, Texas, USA

Attitude, Center for Contemporary Public Arts, Bitola, Macedonia

2008

Video Art and Architecture, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia

Illuminators International, Yekaterinburg Koltsovo Airport, Russia

Urban Identity, Monkey town, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York, USA

Harry Smith Anthology Remixed, The Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), Glasgow, UK

2007

Digital Long Island Media Festival, IMAC Theater, New York, USA

The International Experimental Film Festival, Floean Museum, Baia Mare, Romania

Video Art & Architecture, The Cultural Communication Centre of Klaipeda, Lithuania

& University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

2006

First Play Berlin, Hau 2, Berlin, Germany

2004

Lux Artist Film, The Royal College, London, UK

Video Art & Architecture, Culteral el Molino Atomic, Barcelona, Spain

2003

Crossovers Japan, Toyota Museum of Art, International House, Kyoto, Japan



The Meeting (Detail), Gigapan, Venice, Italy, 2010

The Emily Harvey Foundation offers residencies in Venice, Italy, for innovative artists, writers, musicians, videographers, dancers and other creative thinkers in mid to late career.

Emily Kreis Harvey (1941-2004) was a New York gallerist known for her support of the international avant-garde community. She divided her time between New York and Venice, Italy, where she made her home. She loved Venice, and wanted others to share in her experience of this ancient and unique Italian city. She loved art and artists, and creative people of all types, and particularly wanted to support mature artists with her residencies, since there were so few facilities specifically for them. She died in Venice in 2004.



www.emilyharveyfoundation.org



www.johnson-perkins.co.uk
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