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ART

MAY 4, 2014

## VEILS

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INTERVIEWED BY JENNIFER HERREMA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRANDON HARMAN



**Jhordan Dahl** and **Ariana Papademetropoulos** are artists and curators. Their latest project is *Veils*, an exhibition at the Underground Museum in Los Angeles, featuring the work of forty artists. Jennifer Herrema of Black Bananas and Royal Trux caught up with the duo for The Lab.

**JENNIFER HERREMA**—In a world where everybody wants to be known, seen, and admired for doing absolutely nothing at times, requesting intentional obscurity as the “veils” theme of your show implies is an awesome concept. How did you arrive at the idea?

**ARIANA PAPADEMETROPOULOS**—Actually the concept started over a year ago. I had never curated a show before but felt an impulse to put something stimulating together. I tried to pinpoint where my worlds could collide in terms of my interests in contemporary art, historical art, “art” that existed outside the norm of traditional art, such as shrunken heads or Victorian spirit photography, and overall concepts I was excited by, essentially pareidolia, myth, and the psychology of an image. Why was I drawn to what I was drawn to? Obscurity, illusion, the hidden and the revealed, a change in perception due to the viewer’s experiences, and mystery were some of the attracters. I thought about the influences on my own work and the interests of the artists whom I admired. I found that





everything coagulated through the concept of veils, a symbol that has been present in art for hundreds of years. When I asked Jhordan to collaborate with me on this project, it was a no-brainer. As you know, Jennifer, she has curated amazing shows before and most importantly she is really good at manifesting her vision, the perfect collaborator to enter a vortex with!

JHORDAN DAHL—When Ari and I began our collaboration it was quite serendipitous to find that we were both exploring similar interests and aesthetics within our own work at the same time. I had just finished production on Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe’s installation *Stray Light Grey* in New York, digging deep into their fictional world, which in itself was also a veil. I have always had a fascination for the historical and more obscure geneses of artistic creativity and the people who “make it happen.” When I moved to LA the “treasure hunt” of Old Hollywood and the fairytale lore of the city was compelling and inescapable. This city I now live in is layered with hidden meanings and facades. That being said, I was ready for a new exciting project and this felt like the perfect concept for both of us.



JH—Jhordan, you are an amazing “closer” seeing things through to fruition as opposed to being satisfied with strong ideas that may or may not come together or sort themselves out. What is it that drives you to work so hard in the name of “art”?

JD—Art has always been a passion of mine since I was a child. Several of my extended family members are artists as well so that creativity has always been close by. I don’t necessarily think my drive is strictly in the name of “art.” While I can appreciate a variety of artistic endeavors, there are few that totally captivate my thoughts and imagination. When that does happen, whether it is with art, performance, music, film, fashion, design, architecture, et cetera, I become totally engrossed from start to finish. I’m a very particular person with very particular taste and when I feel a connection to something I almost become obsessed bringing my vision to light, regardless of any anticipated or unforeseen obstacles, time constraints, budgetary concerns, rejections, lack of sleep, or any other seeming impossibility for bringing that vision to fruition.

JH—So many group art shows are curated around a theme; why do you think that is?

AP—There is a need to guide the viewers, to give them a compass when navigating the exhibition. At the same time, the curator needs a springboard to get things rolling. With this theme, we began to see all work through the lens of the veil, and fortunately much of the work we both like fit within this subject.

It is also fascinating to observe how a work can change through the





power of the theme. For instance, what would Brad Elterman's photo of Michael Jackson from 1982 reference on its own, and what does it reference when in a group show about veils? All of a sudden, it re-contextualizes the piece and acquires more meaning.

JH—Do you think certain themes can become more important than the individual works, for instance the ubiquity of all women-based shows?

AP & JD—We were certainly aware of this and did our best to circumvent it. First off, we don't think any work should rely on a theme to make it strong; all work should be strong on its own. Second, we wanted everyone that came into the exhibition to be entertained by viewing the work on its own without being aware of the "theme." Not everyone is going to read the text and know what we are thinking, so it was vital for us to not have this show aimed directly at scholars, but at the general public. That being said, the veil as a theme does accomplish something magical – it reveals how these completely different artists connect, and that alone we found compelling.

JH—How did you guys go about enlisting the artists? Was there a particular artist or piece that sparked the flow?

AP & JD—We sat down one day, and we each made our wish lists. As we were writing these artists down, we thought maybe it was more for inspiration rather than reality. We both wrote down our "dream" artists as a way to get the creative vision going. Ari wrote down Marjorie Cameron and Jeffrey Vallance, then Jhordan added Robert Heinecken and Wallace Berman and we realized we both had similar visions: Eric Yahnker, Kaari Upson, Jim Shaw, the list kept going. It was initially very intimidating to engage these artists, but fortunately the outcome was rather grand, to us at least! Jhordan had seen a Barry X Ball marble sculpture of a veiled woman at Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery in Paris last summer and couldn't get this piece out of her mind. This bust became our mascot of sorts and we used a photo of the sculpture as a symbol of inspiration for the completion of the exhibition. We also became very involved with the illusion/allusion of the veiled woman and the historical references. This in essence was something we were interested in showing; the historical and the contemporary as they allude to the veil and the illusion. Jhordan decided to call the gallery in Paris and subsequently talked to Barry who agreed to be in the show.

JH—The range of artists is amazing too... did you have any trouble bringing such well-known artists together with young aspiring artists?

AP & JD—Surprisingly, the artists who are more well known were very humble, and just as excited, or more, about the show than the less known artists. We have to tell you, there were a few up and coming artists who gave our show a "pass" because it wasn't at a well-known



gallery, and this tells you something about the commercialization of contemporary art.

Initially it was a challenge to get some of those bigger artists, considering we did not have backing from a major gallery – we were just two girls with nothing more to offer than our ideas and enthusiasm. But once we got in touch with the artists and started the conversation, everyone got really excited. We both came from a point of view of not wanting to show work that's trendy; we simply wanted to show work that was honest and had a strong dialectic with our theme. In the end, it seems that sticking to our vision and not getting caught up in the politics of the art world really paid off.

More—

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