

Everything is Broken

Interview with Luca Dipierro by Emily Hunter

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Can you tell us a bit about your background?

I am pretty much self taught. I did classical studies: Latin, Greek, philosophy, art history. I wanted to be writer, but nobody in school taught me what I expected, and I didn't really know what to expect. I expected to write I guess. But everything I learned in school was meant to make me into a critic or a teacher, somebody who analyzes art instead of making art. I am not saying that all the books of literature theory that I had to read didn't help me, because they made me conscious about the fact that literature and art in general can be deconstructed, like a toy, and described, that art is not a metaphysical mystery. I am saying that Italian school is really conservative, and that you start to carry a huge patrimony of art and history that can paralyze you, if you don't learn how to get rid of it. My art teacher used to say that I was too unprecise to be good at drawing. My art teacher showed his paintings in restaurants and pizzerias, so I didn't care much about what he said.

What inspires you?

Everything that is printed. Often, I prefer a good reproduction of a painting on a page than the painting itself. With my visual art it's the same – I don't really care much about selling my pieces. My art is not made to be hung in a living room. I want my stuff to be something you want to look at over and over, something you can't take your eyes off of, something you feel slightly uncomfortable with, something that would be too much to have in front of you every day, on a wall. Books are different than walls. You can decide

to open them or to close them. For everything I do, writing, films or visual art, books are the primary influence. I love books. More: I am obsessed with books. When I was sixteen I thought that everything was in books, everything, especially myself. I loved books with illustrations - not too many illustrations, I liked when the images broke the written page every now and then, when you weren't expecting to turn the page and see a picture. I never perceive illustrations as a comment about the written text. They seem to be a comment, but in fact they are a parallel text, parallel in a subtle way. Illustrations cheat, they seem to tell the same story as the words, but they tell another story.

Is it very different to be a practicing artist in America than to be an artist in Italy?

To me, it doesn't really matter where I am. I need a working space that is like an extension of my body, so comfortable that I don't need to think about anything else but what is on my desk or on the screen of my computer. That's all. One thing that is different is underground art: in the US there's a strongest do-it-yourself ethic, for sure, which doesn't exist at all in Italy. When I was into punk rock, fifteen years ago, I was buying tons of vinyls, twelve inches, seven inches, every possible format, just for the covers. It was art that I could do, that everybody could do, and it was incredibly inventive and funny. Drawing without knowing how to draw well: Pettibon on the Minutemen and Black Flag albums was like a revelation. I think that an artist like Pettibon wouldn't have been possible in Italy. You live too close to the Sistine Chapel to think that you don't need to go to art school to make art.

You are a writer in addition to being a visual artist. Do you see your writing as an influence for your visual work? Do the two ever blur together?

Everything starts from writing. For me, words and storytelling come first. But my visual work is not really influenced by my stories. My visual art starts where my stories end. My drawings and paintings live in the blanks of language – they are a sort of anti-language, of anti-literature. They are illustrations of stories I'll never write. I need to draw because otherwise I would collapse under the weight of my own words. I make art when I feel the

need to shut up.

I think it is very interesting how you incorporate text in both Italian and English in your works. Do you find that being bilingual gives you flexibility in your work? Are there some ideas that need to be communicated in one particular language?

Words in my drawings don't communicate anything, they are objects. I don't read words on a painting, I just look at them. In visual art, for me it's really important how words look like. They seem to be scrambled, but in fact it is the most difficult part of what I do, where I am more careful than ever. I draw a head, whatever head I draw is gonna be ok, I can cut it out, paint it, make it look as I want, but with words it's different. I have to paint them like an ancient monk, with patience. I mix Italian and English words because they are around me (and in my head) all the time, like a landscape. I paint words like I paint a dog or a hand, so people can see them and touch them. I am obsessed with certain words, like "INRI" (the inscription on Jesus' cross: Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum) or "mangia" ("eat"), but I don't have anything to say, I just like how they look. In ancient paintings of crucifixions, I am always delighted by the "INRI" above Jesus' head.

You've spoken before about your habit of doodling... making pictures while you are on the phone or doing/thinking about something else. How do these incidental images become part of your works?

Doodling is often the way I start. I like the automatic quality of doodles. But I don't like automatic art. What I try to do is to take doodles to a different level, to cut them, shred them, glue them together, re-combine them and transform them. It's a useless alchemy. I think that my work is kind of melancholic, like the eyes of Boris Karloff in Frankenstein, because nothing is a whole, and everything is broken. I like to put the pieces together.