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ART FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE

大ス 和 マイク

ART FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE

United works by
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大ス 和 マイク

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The Japanese inside me

My art is often a combination of words and pictures, that questions the surrounding society. I have an opinion, of just about anything. Which isn't so strange, given that I am a Dane. It is a Nordic thing. We have flat hierarchical societies; we are encouraged to be anti-authoritarian. We even question God and make fun of him in children programs on public service television.

So we are raised to question. And following that, comes that we are expected to have an opinion. You might see a Danish child tell the parents that he or she doesn't care. In Danish doesn't care, is *lige-glad* (*lige* meaning straight/even and *glad* meaning happy). And you might very well hear the parents respond: *Hvis man er ligeglad er man aldrig rigtig glad*, meaning, if you don't care, you are never really happy.

I once met this guy in a bar, who figured that his recent divorce was a result of having to have an opinion about everything. Especially the trips to IKEA, had been poison to the marriage, because a simple thing like buying a thermo, could not be completed without both putting forth their opinion and then debating.

I don't have that problem. I am married to a Cuban and she certainly doesn't require my opinion about what household items to buy. I am happy.

I am going to use this exhibition as an opportunity to not care. To not have any opinion or ask any smart questions in my art. No clever comments or jokes. I'll go back to the beginning, where the tree of art divides the first time; into line and colour. Line, that further along the evolution connects to storytelling. And colours, that further along connects to music – creating atmosphere. I'll just concentrate on the aesthetics. No one masters the pure aesthetics, better than the Japanese. Their art is so tight, so focused, so balanced. I love Japanese art. And Japanese culture. And Japanese people. I can't say the same about mainland Chinese. Quite the contrary.

For a while I'll leave Smike Kászner behind. Instead, I will be Japanese. I will be 大和 Yamato 木下 Kinoshita. That sounds cool. And Yamato is just into the surface aesthetics. He doesn't even care if it is canvas or beachwear textile, that he is doing his art on. He has even established an online bikini shop that sells his art on bikinis and other swimwear. In honour of his late friend, he has given the shop the domain: smike.fashion

I believe in Yamato.

Smike Kászner



Art in colours

I have reset myself. Or is it Yamato? All the way back to lines and colour. The tree of art's first bifurcation is line and colour. The line will further along the evolution relate to stories and the colour will relate to music. The story will one day become conceptual art and the colour abstract and expressionistic.

There is a limit to how many times one finds it interesting hearing the same story. With music it is different. It colours the mood. It can be there, like a film score, without disturbing the story. But the story can't be there without disturbing the music. So says Yamato.

I have reset myself. I have removed the words. I have always found it easy to use words. Now I do colours.

My first conscious experience with colours

My first conscious experience with the influence and meaning of colour, is when I am 5 years old. I start at Braeburn House School on Gitanga Road in Nairobi. It is a very British school with only a handful black children. We boys often played the English against the Germans in the breaks. Not being British, I was the obvious choice as a German and thereby on the eternally losing side. It is not before 1978, when I leave the school, that I hear about a war called the Vietnam War, that actually has taken place during all these years my friends and I were re-enacting World War 2.

The school is owned by Mrs. Langley. She is fond of Toyota automobiles, hence her two daughters are named Corolla and Carina. But Mrs. Langley is also very fond of the colour purple, so most of the school is painted in purple, lavender or white. Needless to say, the school area is also home to a number of jacaranda trees, which flowers are purple. The girls uniforms consist of purple cardigans and lavender/whi-

te chequered dresses. We boys have a purple, black, white striped tie and a purple pullover. Our sports clothes is also purple, but does however change to lavender after many a wash. If awarded a certificate of swimming proficiency, this would also be printed with purple letters. In those years I became conscious of how colour could influence.

My second conscious experience with colours

2 years upon leaving Braeburn I am a pupil at Sorø Akademi, a Danish boarding school. Quickly the preferred colour is black. It is the 80's and punk and new wave means that everything should be black, including clothes. I can't imagine Mrs. Langley choosing black for her school, just as I can't imagine punk and new wave dictating purple as the colour of the day. I have however often seen the 2 colours side by side in Tonga in connection with funerals. Purple and black was dominant in Nuku'alofa when Taufa'ahau Tupou IV died.

The second major experience with colours happens in this black boarding school period. Although amphetamine and punk suit each other well, there was space for yet another drug – one that could something with colours. The boarding school owned the nearby forests and meadows, where there is an abundance of magic mushrooms. In these formative years, in the early 80's, that was my drug of choice. For days on end, I would eat them. Amphetamine I viewed as mere fuel. But psilocybin was modular. One could play with it. One could get colours to be more present. One could see the rainbow's colours glow from the moon (under certain weather conditions that is also possible without psilocybin, but not with same intensity). Psilocybin is like a prism that breaks the light. Psilocybin changed my preference for colours. It changed which colours that I found particular attractive.

The third experience with colours

The third and last major experience I have with colours is after starting at the art academy in Copenhagen. Here was a unique space named Farveteknisk Laboratorium (Colour Technical Laboratory), led by Associate Professor Henrik Boëtius. For centuries the academy had accumulated knowledge about colours and how they came to be. There were glass jars just like in an old natural history museum, just that, instead of animals, the jars contained pigment.

When Boëtius emptied the laboratory some years later, he found 4 large jars with natrium rods covered by petroleum, but without labels. These jars were in a cupboard right next to where we sat when Boëtius used the blackboard. Had someone careless like myself discovered these jars, that person might just have opened them for a further examination. The way I understand it, such natrium rods are not fond of contact with air and certainly not water, for then the risk of a powerful explosion is possible. The emptying of Farveteknisk Laboratorium revealed many interesting items. My friend Bertil saved himself a jar of real Mummy brown, that otherwise would have been thrown out. Real Mummy brown was made in the 16th and 17th centuries from white pitch, myrrh, and the remains of ancient Egyptian mummies! Who in their right mind would stumble across a 4,000 year mummy and then think: Let's make it into powder and see how it performs as paint pigment? Well, apparently someone did.

Besides learning how to make our own acrylic, tempera and oil paint, Boëtius also taught us about the techniques and pallets that had been used through the centuries. We would then sit and copy the old masters, so we would understand their techniques. I participated in a number of these courses – despite my patience not quite being large enough to just sit and copy the old masters. But we had a good time, the other nerds and I ("Little Zahrtmann" as I was

called by Boëtius (Zahrtmann was a Danish painter, 1843 - 1917)).

Amongst the wilder things we made, was cooking Rubens' paint medium. Whether it indeed is Rubens that invented this paint medium (some say it is not him) or not, it is a fabulous paint medium. For years I thought it was called tricksotropic features, because this medium was almost like magic. But the word is thixotropic. It means that this medium is thick and jelly like under static conditions but will flow when mechanically affected e.g. by a brush, but then returns again to a more jelly like state when the brush lets go. Using Rubens' medium makes the layered oil painting a completely different pleasure. The only drawback is that it is little bit poisonous. For those familiar with the Danish language I have made a video on how to cook this medium in the right way: <https://vimeo.com/101602847>

Boëtius teaching of colour theory and my own experience with colours and psilocybin matched. Boëtius was very fascinated by Goethe's colour theory (colours are a sensorial experience – they are, so to speak, inside us), to such an extent that Boëtius, together with two other likeminded did a book and a film about Goethe's colour theory, "Lyset, mørket og farverne" (In English: Light, Darkness and Colour). The film is assessable in English here: <https://top-documentaryfilms.com/light-darkness-colors/>

I remember sitting at home in the living room, with torches and foil in different colours, in order to show my partner at the time, what I had experienced with Boëtius. "Light, Darkness and Colour" is unfortunately an overlooked work, despite being a European masterpiece, when it comes to communicating colour theory. I also had a prism like the one Boëtius used. I had been to Weimar and visited Goethe's house (now a museum) and there immediately had bought a copy of his prism in the museum shop.

Probably the most mindblowing times was when Boëtius started the slide viewers and used dias to demonstrate some of Edwin H. Land's (the man who invented Polaroid film) lineups with light and colour. One can make colour photos out of black and white photos within additive colours!

Boëtius' focus was on one of the most essential things here in life... colours.

There aren't any words in my new paintings (there usually are), but there is a lot of colour. Accompanied by small Rembrandt, Lawson Wood, Clifford Webb inspired figures, that facilitate the blossom of these colours. On

the whole, it's a lot about colours these days. I have made an online bikini shop. Here I have taken very colourful wordless backgrounds and elements that I have used in my art to design bikinis: www.smike.fashion

Yes, it's mostly about colours at the moment. I allow myself to stay in the colours and press one tube flat after another. I considered titling this exhibition: Art in colours. But then came Yamato along and we called the exhibition: Art for Ordinary People. I think that title still fits the fact that colours are something we all have in common and something we share.



I don't have any class photos where I am present. But to show the purple and lavender in the uniforms at Braeburn House School, is here a photo from 1970 of the 1. graders. They were 2 years my senior since I start in 1972.



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A talk amongst friends

Smike: I am so happy you agreed on this small exhibition, in which we have collaborated and made works of art together. Tell me, what is the biggest difference between the Danish and the Japanese approach to art?

Yamato: Thank you. I am also very happy and honoured to work with you Smike. Without offending anyone, maybe it is possible to say that we in Japan place more attention to beauty. Or at least the details in beauty. In Denmark, it seems, that it is more common to work with the ugly. To investigate the object. But you also have a lot of humour and irony in your art. I am talking about contemporary art of course.

Smike: Can you name some of these Danish artists that work with the ugly and humour?

Yamato: Maria Wandel. I had the good fortune to see her recent exhibition 'Rewild Tokyo'. This was the first time I saw her art. When I later discovered examples of her earlier work, which contain ironic and humorous comments, I was surprised. She can combine the unhelpful with the well thought out, ugliness with beauty and the abstract with comments. I believe the English term for a person like this is the whole package. Or come to think of it, does the term "the whole package" imply a person with both inner values such as intelligence and outer values such as a beautiful face? In any case that would also apply to Maria Wandel. I hope I am not offending anyone by saying, that for us Japanese she represents classical European beauty. When my wife saw a catalogue photo of Maria Wandel, she exclaimed that Wandel reminded her of Catheriné Deneuve.

Smike: Maybe we should get back to the question of Danish artists that work with the ugly and humour? Can you mention anyone else that comes to your mind?

Yamato: Oh yes. There is one other Danish artist that

deserves mentioning. And he is also the whole package. He resembles George Clooney. Don't worry, I won't talk more about whole packages. I am thinking of Lars Grenaae. I have seen his works at the art academy where he works. His oeuvre is enormous and original. Not only does he mix the ugly, the beautiful, the funny and the thoughtful, his technique is of very high quality. It is a shame he is so overlooked.

Smike: So right you are! Why is it you think he is overlooked?

Yamato: I don't know in detail what makes the Danish art world tick or what makes Grenaae tick. But if we speak in general terms, it has always been so. Being overlooked, not having your genius recognized, is part of being an artist and an author. There is only so much space where the light hits the floor. And then there is the whole issue of being ahead of your time. Then for sure there is no space on the scene for you. It is an occupational hazard, soldiers risk being shot, hair dressers risk getting skin allergy, change management consultants risk wasting their life on hot air and artists risk getting overlooked.

Smike: But are more good artists like Grenaae being overlooked nowadays than before?

Yamato: That is a good question. It is naïve to think you'll become known and successful in this time and age, by just producing good art. The commercialization and professionalization of the art world, rewards the extrovert strategy focused artist that also makes good art. One should think that the professionalism would call for a specialization, where the artist could concentrate on making art and others took care of marketing and sales. But quite the contrary has happened. I see this in Japan as well as the US and Europe. The artist cannot depend on the gallerist to do the sales. The artist himself or herself must besides being a good and productive artist, also be a good en-



tertainers. The artist must also have good social skills, stay focused, make budgets, choose the right partner and so on. This is part of the shift from the iconographic to the iconological, fuelled not only by the big identity theme since the firing of God, but also the global growth in liquid assets. The arrival of the large tech companies, most established within the last two decades, and the private fortunes this has caused, means that an enormous amount of liquid assets have been added to the top of the global social pyramid. These assets are looking for places to be invested and here art has showed itself to be attractive. The global art market is now more than 60 billion dollars annually. If we look at fine art auction sales by category, then 30 years ago, contemporary art stood for less than 1% of the sales. Now it represents more than 15%. Meaning the money is not only influencing art done decades or centuries ago, but also the art being produced right now.

My newest theory that I am working on, is that the age where avantgarde could exist is gone. If we require, that the art of our time must enter and satisfy a larger and more complex commercial system, both as part of the experience economy and as part of the world of investment, can art then possibly hope to be ahead of it's time? Or will the demand result in art being a mirror of it's own time, just like the case is with advertising, and thereby making avantgarde as good as dead? I don't remember who said it, but I agree that art is suffering from the homogeneity that comes from globalization.

Smike: So money is the weight under which art might experience a collapse?

Yamato: Money is not the only issue here. Money has come and gone through the ages. The real game changer is digitalization. Digitalization changes the way we produce, experience, exchange, and finance art. We live in a world with the opportunity for endless copies, which is the basic premiss of being digital. This is the opposite of the premiss of most art, where the unique calls for the artist's signature. The art as well as the supporting elements, such as the art catalogue, has gone digital. We are accustomed

to what we earlier saw as communication, now is the art experience itself. Are we in the museal room we can even experience the work of art in a complete enclosing digital frame, like the case was for the multi-sensoric exhibition Van Gogh Alive, where one could walk around inside Van Gogh paintings.

The future offers augmented reality and virtual reality. The world will be turned upside down because of artificial intelligence. One might draw a parallel to when modernism entered the scene at the beginning of the 20th century, and where giant technological leaps also were taken frequently.

What the new digital technology has meant, is that it has provided the Duchamp art concept of everything can be art, with a platform that allows for art to simultaneously be the ultimate commercial commodity. Fine art is the only product where there is a 1 to 1 correlation between the product itself and the marketing. With art the wrapping can be the product and vice versa. It is alone the intention of the artist that determines if we see an advertisement for the work of art or the work of art itself. There is right now an American artist suing an Italian artist, claiming the Italian has copied his work of nothing! His work that contains nothing!

It will be interesting to see where block chain art will lead us. Beeple's \$69 million sale represented the first Non-fungible token sale for Christie's. And thereby also the first unexplainable work of art sold by Christie's. How do you explain non-fungible token art? It is so contradictable to everything we have been taught about art. The whole romantic idea of the genius that makes unique work. The best explanation I have heard is from our mutual friend Hibari lanfu, she says that NFT art is like owning the right to say a certain prostitute is your exclusive girlfriend, yet she is still a prostitute and available to anyone else that pays her. I wish those who are interested in art would invest in artists and not art.

Smike: I need to reboot. I need a joint.

Yamato: If you need it, I need it.



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Yamato and Smike have started a shop together. The following is an excerpt from a conversation Yamato and Smike had recently about their shop.

Smike: Why don't you explain the reader what our bikini shop is about?

Yamato: Well to begin with both you and me had a lot of digital files with art, stored on hard disks, we had made over the years. Some exhibited and some not. Some not even finished works of art, but just layers in Photoshop. The idea originally was to take the finished works and sell them as posters online. But then there are so many online poster shops already, so instead of paper we turned to fabrics. We used the art we had for DTG (direct to garment.) We have made an online shop, of mostly beachwear.

Smike: But we haven't sold anything yet!

Yamato: That is right. Except for a pair of shorts to a friend. That is because we haven't launched yet. We haven't marketed the shop yet. Besides being busy with other things, like the exhibition "Art for ordinary people" we haven't found the right partner. Both of us are too old to really be able to understand and connect to the whole influencer and Instagram

scene. We need someone young and smart to push the shop. Our designs are actually young and fresh enough. When we have tested our products on young people, they all go for it. Now it is my turn to ask a question... Smike, what status do these bikinis have in regard to art?

Smike: I don't consider the products themselves as art. They are craft based on art elements. For others to see it as fine art, one would probably be required to sign the product... the transfer of mana to the item. And maybe also number each item, if it was an edition. But like I said, I see it as craft. Now the concept itself is easier to label art. But that really doesn't interest me right now. What I think is interesting is that you and me, once again mix our aesthetics and produce new images. I think this is a fun project. Yes, we just need to find the right partner who is into SoMe marketing and then launch. It is an international shop. My goal is to connect to other artists and have their images, that they have on some hard disk, and use them for other designs of swimwear and other clothing. I would like an online shop that had the designs of thousands and thousands of artists. Danish, Cuban, Japanese, Vietnamese, Samoan artists...





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