

25 Questions For Offbeat Materials Artist Jim Drain

BY ALLISON MEIER | NOVEMBER 05, 2012

Name: Jim Drain

Age: 36

Current Exhibition: “Drain Expressions” at PRISM Gallery, 8746 West Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, November 10, 2012 — January 5, 2013.

It’s been eight years since you’ve had a major exhibition in Los Angeles. What do you have planned for “Drain Expressions” at PRISM?

It is a homecoming of sorts. I moved to L.A. after school for a year. Allison Miller and Kerry Tribe were at UCLA and I thought I was going to study with Chris Burden. “Boys Don’t Cry” was being shot and Alex and I would run into Chloe Sevigny at The Smell. L.A. was just starting to blossom into what it is now.

I always feel like it is a privilege to be able to be an artist and to be able to exhibit my work all over the world. Every show is a discovery and especially this one.

What do I have planned? In the past I may have been more interested in taking on the entire space as its own world, demarcating the exhibit as separate from “everything else.” I am seeing the PRISM show as an opportunity to let the world bleed in more.

You’re known for your work with offbeat and discarded materials like yarn and melted crayons. Any new material you are experimenting with in the show?

All the materials are pretty standard for this show — it is the way they are employed that may not be so straightforward.

During this year’s Art Basel Miami Beach, you’ll be relaunching the Bas Fisher Invitational, the alternative art space you run with Naomi Fisher, and bringing back the Weird Miami Bus Tours. You’ve been working out of Miami for a few years. What makes it an interesting place for experimentation? How do you showcase that through these projects?

I suspect that most people in the world will travel through or at least wish to travel through Miami in their lifetimes. I think it is on the same level as seeing the pyramids in Giza for many people. But, Miami is slippery: It is a place that is always that “distant orgiastic green light” while also being a hot, tropical, and very real place. It is difficult to know what Miami is, even after being there for seven years. This is why we do the bus tours. Each tour is a different and complete definition of the city through an artist’s perspective.

As someone who got their start living in the countercultural Fort Thunder old factory in Rhode Island, you seem like an unexpected choice to be participating in the U.S. Department of State's Art in Embassies program. Was it a surprise for you to be asked to participate and were you eager to be involved?

I have been working with students a bunch for the past few year and making public work has been a long-time goal — in this way it has been the perfect fit. It has been an exceptionally great experience and yes, I definitely was eager to be involved — especially since it involves a trip to Morocco. I am sold!

For the Art in Embassies program, you're working in conjunction with RISD, where you studied sculpture, to design an outdoor artwork for the U.S. embassy in Rabat, Morocco being opened in 2014-15. Can you give us a preview and tell us about the process of its creation?

The project was proposed to be one made in collaboration with RISD students. We really tossed this one around a bit. We had nine students for six weeks crunching this proposal and at no point did we have our bearings. None of us were really sure if what we were doing was real, important, or final. This is a scary and awesome place to be, but I think it drove my teaching assistants bonkers. It was kind of like having the captain steer the ship from the lifeboat. Essentially, we created a toolbox that was critical for the next step: coming up with a mock-up for the sculpture this past summer. It helped to raise simple, but important, questions: is an embassy a site? If so, whose site? At the end of the day, you have to take a leap.

I leapt for a bronze casting process that uses a multi-part resin-infused sand mold. It makes for a very raw casting. I want the sculpture to look as if it rose out of the Saharan desert. The mock-up we have is more like the ice cream "American version" of this.

Describe a typical day in your life as an artist.

This is a better question to ask my interns. I feel like I live a pretty normal existence, but I don't think this is so much the case. I like to imagine that the Neanderthals were all really good artists.

What's the last show that you saw?

The Al Taylor show at David Zwirner comes to mind first.

What's the last show that surprised you? Why?

Taylor's work seems to be leaking from some hidden source out there. I have never seen a sexier tin can.

What's your favorite place to see art?

...outdoors in the High Desert.

What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

...the "secure empty trash" option.

Where are you finding ideas for your work these days?

...literally in the Stop & Shop parking lot in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

Do you collect anything?

Jokes.

What's the last artwork you purchased?

I would have purchased Mickey Zacchilli's comic book, "RAV6," but she gave it to me first.

What's the first artwork you ever sold?

No one knows this, but I was the one who sold the Klimt to the Lauders.

What's the weirdest thing you ever saw happen in a museum or gallery?

Wasn't there actual fucking that happened in the Charles Ray show at LACMA? I wish I popped in on that unexpectedly. Didn't Mike Kelley take a dump at the Whitney once? Awkward! GWAR should play MoMA.

What's your art-world pet peeve?

I try not to dwell. But if I did, maybe it would have to do with gender bias.

What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant?

A good plate of sushi after an opening helps to soothe that post-opening blues — especially since you feel like raw meat yourself. The best sushi would be on 79th Street in Miami at the Japanese Market. SO YUMMY!

Do you have a museum/gallery going routine?

Go through an exhibition as quickly as you can and then go through it again but slowly. This time, see what sticks.

What's the last great book you read?

John Cage's "Indeterminacy."

What work of art do you wish you owned?

A Julius LeBlanc Stewart nude. They are my new faves. That or a really depressing painting by Kirchner.

What would you do to get it?

I'd eat a Klondike bar.

What international art destination do you most want to visit?

The Museo del Prado.

What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?

The Whitney has a Lee Krasner painting up right now. It is big and amazing and right down the hall from a room full of Agnes Martin paintings. I think if I were a jaguar pacing in the zoo, I would choose to pace between these two rooms.

Who's your favorite living artist?

Naomi Fisher.

What are your hobbies?

Looking over Naomi's shoulder at her Instagram feed.