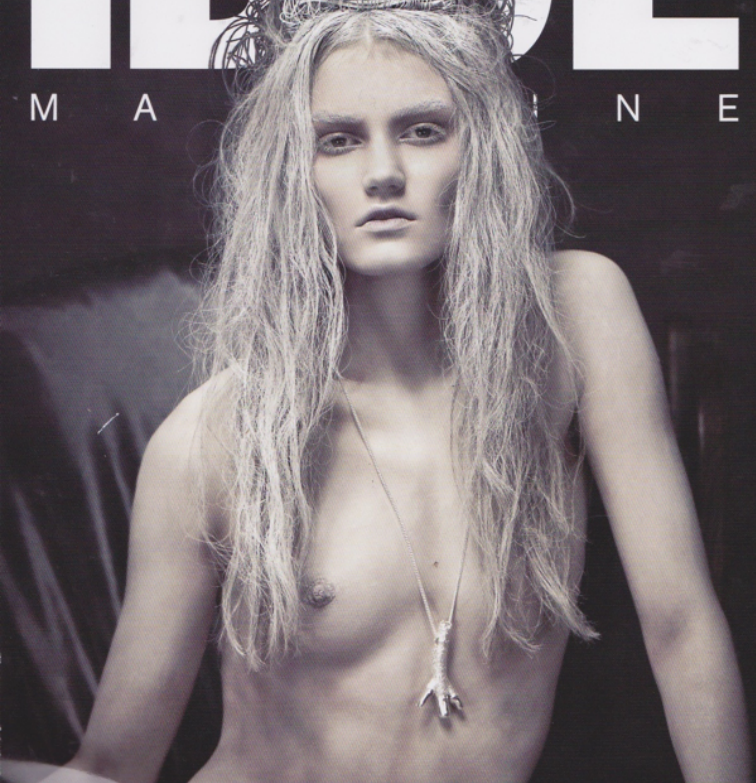


# IDOL

M A N E



# STUART SEMPLE

“SOMETIMES IDEAS DON’T NEED  
HUGE PLATFORMS TO WORK.”

*British born Stuart Semple has had a glittering career as both an artist and a curator. A life-changing event at a young age had a dramatic effect on his work. Studying art, Stuart went on to produce over three thousand works in three years. Since then he has shown and curated in galleries all over the world, including London, Hong Kong and New York. Stuart’s playful take on art has given him opportunities to collaborate with artists, designers and musicians alike. IDOL spoke to Stuart to find out more.*

INTERVIEW BY  
THEODORA BARKER

**What has been the most poignant moment in your life?**

It was probably my near-death experience, after a bad allergic reaction. I was 19. After that moment I committed myself to make art every day. It was at that point I thought ‘what do I want to do with my life?’ Before this happened I was just at art school, making my work, but not really ‘my’ work, drawing and painting. But there was no necessity to do it, no need to do it. When I nearly died the doctors didn’t know what I was allergic to and I was told it could happen again at any time, next week, tomorrow. I thought if I don’t know how much time I have left, I might as well use my time well. We are all playing against time, whether we are even conscious of it. None of us are here for very long.

**What has been the biggest inspiration?**

My near-death experience was just an impetus, a kick up the butt. My real inspiration has been music and musicians. Whenever I can’t get in the mood to paint, I turn to music. I channel so much emotion through music and lyrics; it fuels my work.

**Your work often addresses powerful feelings of fear and isolation. Despite your success would you still say that these feelings are still apparent in the way think about your work?**

As time has passed, I have realised I am not going to drop dead from this allergy.



SPECIAL THANKS TO  
RAI ROYAL AND JUSTINE JOSEPHS

Tomorrow is going to happen. But there is still a lot of anxiety. I have an outwardly anxious look upon society. I am anxious about other people rather than me. The environment and political situations, make me uneasy. My work has maybe shifted over time. It is less about me and more about the world – political situations and the change in the UK art world. I have been distressed by the Government cuts in education, in particular, art, which will not be taught in

schools to the extent that it has been. Also the looting and the riots; this is not the country I recognise. It has changed so much and that concerns me.

**Are you ever afraid of what you are saying in your work and what the reaction will be?** Sometimes with more outspoken work. A piece might not be put up in the exhibition and it will be left in the back room. But on the whole I don’t see my work being confrontational.

**You have worked on both small and large scale projects. Do you prefer the larger scale projects because of their more profound effect on the public?**

When work is small and intimate it means a few people can enjoy it. The band I am art director for, Officers, I hand-make all the releases, and I do all the visuals. Recently I made 7-inch vinyls and 10 were given away each gig. Sometimes ideas don’t need huge platforms to work. I like to give things away. It disseminates the art and the music. It gets it out, without being too precious.

**Your Happy Cloud performance in the Tate Britain was made when the recession hit. Do you think it had the positive response you were hoping for?**

As an artist you can’t expect it to actually change anything. But it genuinely made

people smile. I didn't expect more. It spread all over the world. A kid's comic in Korea was sent to me showing the story of the Happy Cloud. I didn't think it would spread that far. It took a life of its own. That was probably the most outspoken thing I have done.

**You helped set up the Aubin Gallery in London - what were your main aspirations for this space, and has it been a success?**

The gallery was to show work of my friends; work that was below the radar that needed to be seen. It didn't have an agenda. But some of the shows were quite punchy. One exhibition was showing the work of the radical 1970s French artists Bazuka who art directed a far left French newspaper and inspired punk in the UK, for example Malcolm McLaren. But they had never shown in the UK. I went over to Paris and brought them over so that they could show in London. The response was great and people really understood it. Of course there are sudo-political statements made by artists like Banksy and Mr Brainwash but these guys, Bazuka really made it and at a time of great revolution.

**How would you define power? And in your opinion, who is the most powerful person in the world?**

Power is about control and the turn of events, being able to have influence on how things happen.

**You have collaborated with many big artists, including Lady Gaga and The Prodigy. Who else do you hope to collaborate with?**

I would like to collaborate with more artists. I don't really connect with what Saatchi etc. do. A show I will do, but there is more to life than a show. It is a bigger world. I am more interested in people. In this day and age, there are so many galleries and so many pop ups. I think you can have exhibitions in your own studio. The idea of a gallery controlling exhibitions doesn't make sense like it used to. You can contact any artist now online. Before you needed a Jay Joplin and the White Cube. That was the only way of getting your work out there. We can now all share our work everywhere.

**Who is your idol? And why?**

David Hockney because he is continuously involved and he is always challenging himself.

He is over 80 and still producing mountains of work. That is what I want to do. And secondly, Connor Oberst the American singer-songwriter. He is the same age as me, and I was finding that all his songs were parallel to what was happening to me. I have followed him ever since. He is an idol of mine. It is as though there is a weird psychic link. God knows what would happen if I actually met him! He is so free, he is spontaneous, he also doesn't know what he is even going to make or do, he just does. And listen John Lennon, because he is a legend.



LEFT Jacket by Jane Bowler • Jumper by Jezebel and Toff  
RIGHT T-Shirt by Jane Bowler • Ring by Bjorg