



'Proto-punk pop polymath'
Dazed and Confused

'A latterday Andy Warhol'
BBC

"... this star's already shining brightly."
i-D Magazine

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and punk..."
Financial Times

"Stuart Semple is one of the hottest contemporary
British artists around"
Palladium

"intelligent commentary on popular culture"
Esquire

"The offspring of Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, as
styled for MTV"
ArtForum

"Basquiat of the noughties"
Time Out

'An art superstar'
Evening Standard



VOGUE

ITALIA

APR
2010
N. 3, 0
11,90 €



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«Uscito dall'ospedale, ho cominciato a dipingere come un pazzo, al ritmo di tre, quattro quadri al giorno. Ne ho realizzati migliaia, e poi li ho venduti tutti su eBay per poche sterline. Adesso sto cercando di ricomprarne alcuni», racconta l'artista

Nell'ex warehouse di Islington vicino alla Victoria Miro gallery, a Londra - dove lavora Stuart Semple, il pomeriggio è all'insegna di David Howie, «l'ultima passione», confessa Stuart, il quale considera la musica un elemento determinante dell'esperienza creativa. Non ancora trentenne, negli ultimi dieci anni Semple ha visto crescere costantemente il proprio profilo nel panorama artistico

che lo ha, anche da un punto di vista ideologico. I miei lavori ne sono soprattutto un commento. Il mio è un approccio veyeuristico, direi». Un compito ambizioso, vista la pernacenza dell'influenza di Warhol nell'arte contemporanea e la percepibile incapacità di trascenderla da parte di molti. Il pop, questo strano animale, «è così veloce, non puoi afferarlo, fuggiva. Bisogna riuscire a conge-

cento delle (molte) difficoltà strutturali. Tra cui il far parte di un mercato dell'arte nel quale la musica aveva e l'essere un prodotto. «L'ho e i miei, immagini, film, riviste: l'artista è parte dello stesso meccanismo commerciale. Non se ne esce: nel momento in cui una casa d'aste o un museo appende un tuo quadro alle pareti, fai parte di quel business model. Io posso solo cercare una via per mantenere una certa integrità nelle cose che offro. Alla domanda faticosa su cosa sia l'arte per lui, Semple risponde con un candore che sarebbe troppo facile bollare come ingenuo: «Cosa considero arte vera? Un qualcosa che scaturisca da una passione e da un'emozione autentica. È tutto quello che posso fare: viverlo in una società come la nostra». A pensarci bene, è in linea con la scelta di un medium, la pittura, spesso considerato paese al panorama contemporaneo, a volte allo scampo inconfessabile di sottoscevere le proprie deficienze tecniche. «Dipingere è importante, fondamentale. È un modo diretto e potente per comunicare qualcosa». L'ultima arma di riconoscimento dei giovani artisti, invece, è soprattutto un'aspirazione commerciale, e questo danneggia la pittura più di ogni altra cosa. Oggi, questo medium può a stento competere con le installazioni, le grandi produzioni concettuali. Ma dipingere è soprattutto difficile, qualcosa che molti artisti concettuali non sono in grado di dominare, e spesso il loro lavoro è un tentativo di deprimere il pubblico da tale rinuncia. Tendiamo a perdere la capacità di guardare immagini statiche perché «il cinema, i videogames e la televisione ci incappano in un processo passivo, di puro intrattenimento a schermo unico. Osservare una fotografia o un quadro richiede una prospettiva diversa. Una prospettiva salvifica, nel caso di Stuart. A diciannove anni, rischia infatti di muore per una devastante allergia, una near-death experience che lo ha messo per sempre sulla via della pittura. «È stato orribile, ero in ospedale con l'acqua che non scendeva più inside vivo. Cosa, continui a chiedermi cosa avrei fatto se fossi sopravvissuto. Non ci misi davvero molto a capire che sarebbe stato dipingere. (La collaborato Marietta Biorgna)

Commenti al moto contemporaneo

by Leonardo Clausi

Fuori da ogni schema predefinito del pop, l'arte di Stuart Semple ha un preciso punto di vista ideologico, che si esprime con la pittura. Un medium forse "passé" per la creatività del XXI secolo; per lui scelta forzata dopo una near-death experience



Stuart Semple nel suo studio di Islington, Londra. Foto: courtesy Royal Academy, london.ac.uk

contemporaneo, grazie a una decina di mostre personali e collettive. E le sue tele, impacciate e cronache, indurrebbero un critico pigro ad ammorzarlo nella genialità post-warholiana. Niente di più sbagliato. «Mi colloco al di fuori della nazione generalista di cultura pop e faccio molta attenzione a non cacciarmi dentro. Cerco di farne una critica, per-

larlo quel tanto che basta per osservarlo da vicino. È un linguaggio universale, un grido di unire due persone molto diverse fra loro grazie alla condivisione dei tempi e dei spazi in cui hanno amato qualcosa. La pittura può usare quel linguaggio per descrivere una realtà al di là dell'elemento, ed è questo che mi interessa. Nobili intenti, che tengono

Aesthetica

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August / September 2008 Issue 24

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Pop Art & Mass Culture

Curated by Stuart Semple

Maybe it's the new exhibitions curated by Stuart Semple featuring that of the UK's most exciting artists, who offer an intriguing insight into how a new generation is making sense of the complexities of mass culture.

Avery wealthy Open Car Club (owner Bentley Car Club) £2.5 million at Christie's New York, (Christie's New York) £1.5 million at Sotheby's New York, and Robert Rauschenberg, but still \$14 million in 'artworks' New York. Another one is representing, especially for those artists considered to be part of the Pop Art movement, since Mr. Abramov of the exhibition, the artist's brother, conceived the idea for the show? Pop Art is a mass culture mass culture is Pop Art. The exhibition is a celebration, a celebration and a celebration. Pop Art is not just the name by the name by the name through artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and the expanded, constantly negotiating the production and 'consumption' of mass culture in their own lives and work.

Pop Art is not just the name by the name through artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and the expanded, constantly negotiating the production and 'consumption' of mass culture in their own lives and work.



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Welcome

Inside this issue



Stuart Semple

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Editor's note

I happened to be in London recently, and I was in the middle of a conversation with a friend who was a member of the 'pop art' movement. He was talking about the 'pop art' movement, and I was talking about the 'pop art' movement. He was talking about the 'pop art' movement, and I was talking about the 'pop art' movement.



Stuart Semple

Stuart Semple is a curator and writer who has curated several exhibitions of pop art and mass culture. He is also the author of several books on the subject. In this issue, he discusses the 'pop art' movement and its relationship to mass culture.

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draw with words, paint with frames, be a poet of art

“La buona arte sia consapevole della sua storia e sia in grado di incanalarla in nuovi ambiti, senza prendersi troppo sul serio.” Stuart Semple collabora con Moncler per i 60 anni del brand.

“Good art is aware of its histories and is able to channel that into new arenas without taking its self too seriously.” Stuart Semple collaborates with Moncler for its 60-year history.

written by Veronica Renato, photography by Emily Mann

Stuart, sei pittore, scultore, creatore di installazioni artistiche e altro ancora... Come definiresti la tua arte?

In realtà cerco di non dare definizioni, mi reputo un artista e mi accosto a qualsiasi mezzo con questa prospettiva. È questione di riuscire a trovare la forma giusta per ogni idea. Mi capita di avere molte idee che si mescolano nello stesso momento, e il luogo ideale per ciascuna di queste può variare, possono trovare la loro dimensione in un video, in un'installazione, in un disegno, in un dipinto o addirittura in parole. La colonna portante nel mio lavoro è il disegno, e tutto scaturisce da lì, gli altri ambiti tendono a contrastare un po' la mia pratica nel disegno, in un modo o nell'altro. I miei video assomigliano più a dipinti e le poesie hanno un qualcosa dei film. Si può dipingere con una videocamera e disegnare con le parole. È possibile tirare fuori un sacco di immagini dalle parole. Non mi interessa eccellere in una disciplina specifica, mi inter-

essa cercare un fondamento appropriato per ogni concetto, non sempre funziona, il che è per me altrettanto entusiasmante di quando invece riesce a funzionare.

Quando hai iniziato a considerarti un artista?

Non è facile da stabilire, ho sempre amato l'arte e ho fatto arte ogni singolo giorno da quando ero bambino. Era qualcosa che dovevo fare per essere felice e non annoiarmi. A 19 anni ho visto la morte in faccia, sono morto per un paio di secondi. E tutto è cambiato da quel momento. Ho deciso che avrei trascorso la mia vita insieme all'arte, è stato come prendere un impegno per sempre, e l'arte in un certo senso lo ha preso, a sua volta, con me, e mi ha dato supporto in periodi molto duri dal punto di vista emotivo. Lì il mio rapporto con l'arte è cambiato ed è diventato molto più profondo. Credo di aver iniziato ad avere la sensazione che sarei diventato un artista. Tuttora, se mi capitano dei giorni in cui non faccio nulla, non mi sento un



Stuart Semple working at his studio on Lionel Terry's portrait for Moncler



"I like the sense of humor that people at Moncler have and the bravery in how they present their ideas. Fashion needs to be brave and it has to push boundaries."

Stuart Semple working at his studio

artista, devo addentrarmi in profondità nella zona creativa per potermi sentire tale. 'Artista' è una parola difficile e carica di significato, con cui non sempre mi sento a mio agio.

Quali sono le idee comuni che ti fanno essere così in sintonia con Moncler?

Collaboro con Moncler ormai da diversi anni, abbiamo molto in comune. Hanno occhi sempre rivolti alla qualità e hanno alle spalle una grande tradizione, ma riescono al contempo ad essere innovativi e divertenti. Adoro il loro senso dell'umorismo e l'audacia con cui presentano le proprie idee. La moda deve essere così e spingersi oltre i confini. E sono tutte cose che credo che anche le varie espressioni artistiche dovrebbero fare. Penso che la buona arte sia consapevole della sua storia e sia in grado di incanalarla in nuovi ambiti, senza prendersi troppo sul serio. Un giaccone, per esempio, ha a che fare con uno dei bisogni più elementari dell'umanità, ossia una fonte di calore che mette al riparo dalle intemperie, siamo noi verso la natura. La mia arte riguarda un'idea simile; il rapporto tra noi e l'ambiente, l'uomo e il suo territorio, che nelle mie opere spesso

non è inteso letteralmente come spazio, ma come ambiente culturale, composto da musica, film, parole e associazioni.

Chi o che cosa ti ha spinto ad avviare la tua carriera?

Mi sono innamorato di un'opera di Van Gogh quando avevo circa 8 anni, non ho pensato ad altro per anni, mi bruciava nella mente. Questo ha fatto una grande differenza all'inizio della mia carriera. Quando Debbie Harry (alias Blondie) ha comprato una delle mie prime tele è stata una grande sferzata di fiducia per quello che stavo facendo. È un mito per me e ha acquistato uno dei primi quadri di Basquiat, che è un'altra grande figura influente per la mia arte. Quando Basquiat ha venduto il suo quadro a Debbie, lei gli ha dato un paio di centinaia di dollari, lui ha portato la sua fidanzata fuori a cena e ha lasciato una mancia di cinquanta dollari. Ho insistito affinché pagasse esattamente la stessa somma per la mia opera, poi ho portato la mia partner fuori a cena e ho lasciato a mia volta una mancia di cinquanta dollari. Ai miei esordi adoravo anche andare a vedere 'A Bigger Splash' di Hockney. Mi sedevo lì e, chissà per quale motivo, mi commuovo fino alle lacrime. Potrei stare lì seduto per ore.

Quali sono i sentimenti che stanno dietro le tue opere?

Variano molto, credo che ognuno abbia una propria storia, si incrociano e talvolta attraversano specifici temi o idee. Rappresentano il mio tentativo di dare un senso al mondo che mi circonda, comprendere me stesso in qualche modo. Nella loro essenza, credo che facciano riferimento a certe questioni o tematiche, l'idea di isolamento, atomizzazione, separazione. Il processo di maturazione, o di crescita in generale. Non c'è un piano, e i pezzi più interessanti non vengono da me, ma tramite me. È come se quei sentimenti non mi appartenessero.

Che cosa preserva il futuro per la tua arte?

Non sono sicuro, mi piace sperimentare e ho più idee di quelle che ho tempo di realizzare, sta tutto nel dare la giusta priorità. Credo che in futuro ci saranno più opere interattive con il pubblico e esibizioni live, e il film mi sta prendendo molto, ma al contempo, la mia attività di pittura è cambiata, ha subito un forte rallentamento ed è divenuta molto più gesturale.

Stuart you are painter, sculptor, installer and much more...

How do you define your art?

I try not to define it really, I define myself as an artist, so I come at whatever medium from that perspective. It's more about finding the right form for an idea. I might have lots of ideas bubbling at any one time and the natural place for those ideas might be different, they might settle in a piece of video work or in an installation, they may well end up in a drawing, a painting or even some writing. The backbone of the whole thing for me is drawing and from that everything else seems to flow, these other arenas tend to hang off my drawing practice in some way. My videos are more like paintings actually and my poems feel a lot like films. You can paint with a video camera and you can draw with words. You can get a lot of pictures out of words. I'm not trying to master a discipline or something, I'm more trying to find an appropriate foundation for a concept, it doesn't always work out and that's as exciting for me as when it does.



Stuart Semple working at his studio



Lionel Terray's portrait by Stuart Semple

When did you start considering yourself as an artist?

It's hard to pin it down, I always loved art and made art every day since I was a very young child. It was just something that I had to do in order to feel happy and not feel bored. When I was 19, I had a near death experience, I died for a few seconds and after that everything changed. I decided that I wanted to spend my life with art, it was like I made a commitment to it, and in a weird way it made a commitment to me and it supported me through some very difficult years emotionally. I suppose at that point my relationship with art changed and became a lot deeper. I think then I started to feel like I was becoming an artist. Even now though, some days, if I don't make something I don't feel I am an artist, I really have to be deep in the creative zone for me to feel it's right to associate myself with that word. 'Artist' is an awkward and very loaded word that I'm not always comfortable with.

What are the common ideas that keep you in this strong affinity with Moncler?

I've been collaborating with Moncler now for many years, we have a lot in common. They have such a strong eye for quality and a strength of tradition yet they remain innovative and entertaining. I like the sense of humor that they have and the bravery in how they present their ideas. Fashion needs to be brave and it has to push boundaries. These are all things that I believe art should do too. I think good art is aware of its histories and is able to channel that into new arenas without taking itself too seriously. I think at its core the down jacket deals with one of humankind's most basic needs, which is warmth and shelter from the elements, it's us against nature. My art really deals with a similar idea; the relationship between us and our environment, the human and their landscape, which in my work is often not a literal space, it's more likely a cultural landscape made of music, and film and words and associations.

What or who has inspired you at the beginning of your career?

I fell in love with a Van Gogh painting when I was about 8 years old, it was all I could think about for years and years, it burned into my mind. That made a big difference, but at the start of my career. I think when Debbie Harry (blondie) bought one of my first canvases it really boosted my confidence in what I was doing. She's a big hero of mine and she bought one of Basquiat's first pictures, who is another big influence on me. When Basquiat sold his picture to Debbie she gave him a couple of hundred dollars for it, and he took his girlfriend out to dinner and left a fifty dollar tip. I insisted that she paid exactly the same amount for my piece, then I took my partner out for dinner and left a fifty dollar tip too. Also near the start I would visit Hockney's 'bigger splash' painting a lot. I'd sit there and for some weird reason it would make me cry. I don't know why. I could sit with it for hours.

What are the feelings behind your works?

They all vary really, I think each one is its own little story, they cross over a bit and sometimes across a series I might explore a specific theme or idea. I suppose they are me trying to make sense of the world around me, to understand me somehow. At their heart I think there are certain issues or themes that they come back to, ideas of isolation, atomization, separateness. The process of growing up or growing in general. There's no big plan for them and the most interesting pieces don't feel like they come from me, they just come through me, it's like those feelings aren't mine.

What will the future of your art look like?

I am not sure, I am always experimenting and I have more ideas than I could possibly have time to realize, so it's about prioritizing them. I think there will be more public interactive works and live stuff, and for now, film is pulling me really strongly, but at the same time my painting practice has really changed, it's slowed down a lot and become much more gestural.



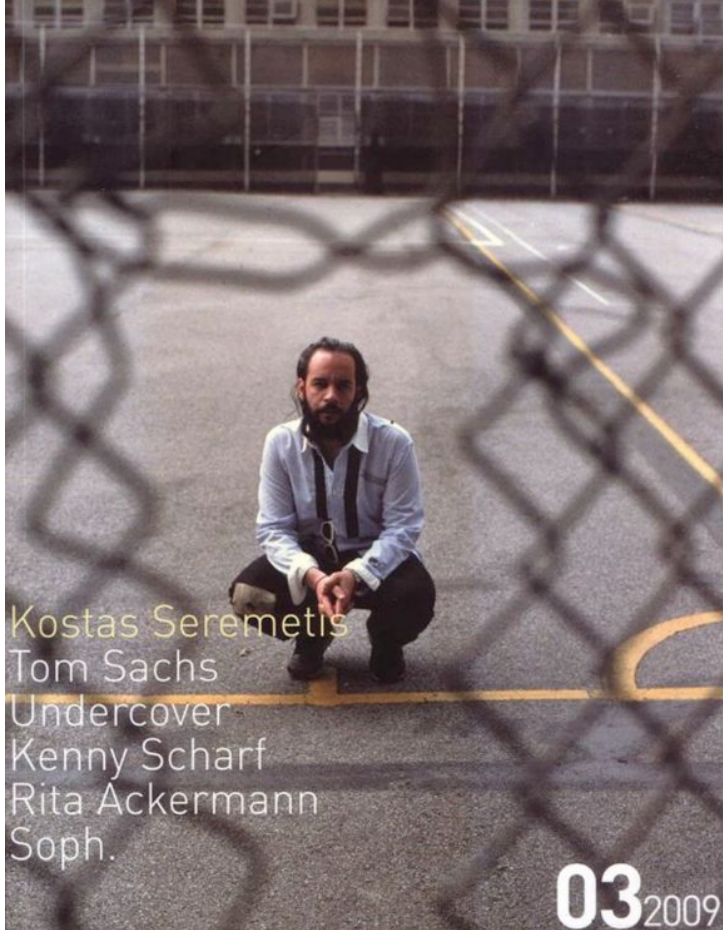
Cindy Sherman

53° BIENNALE
DI VENEZIA
A UNIQUE JOURNEY
INTO THE ARTIST'S
STUDIOS



mander toy by stuart semple

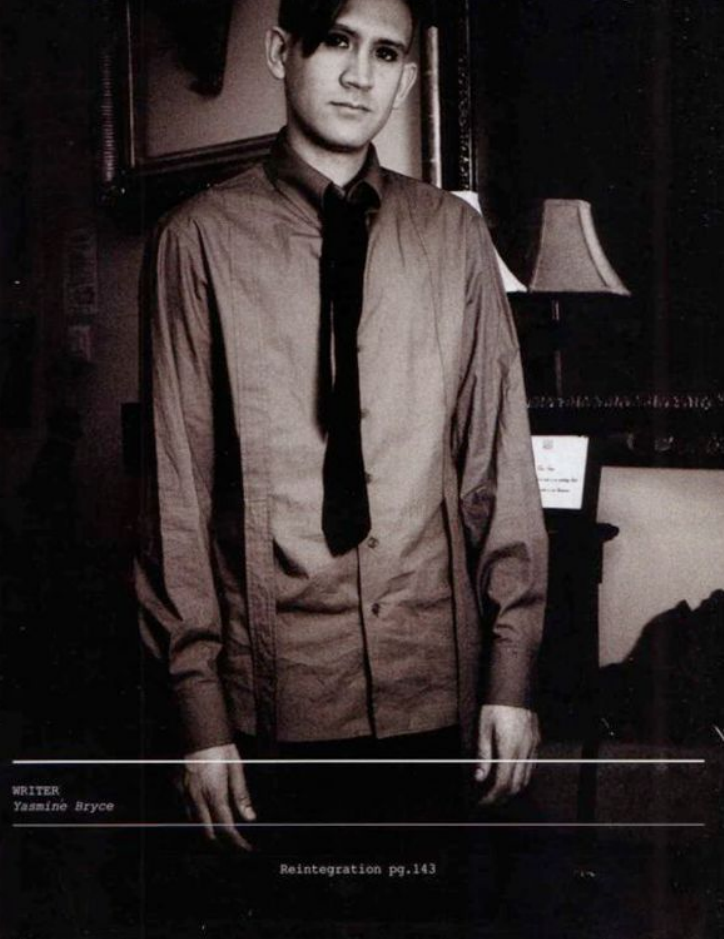
THE NEW ORDER



Kostas Seremetis
Tom Sachs
Undercover
Kenny Scharf
Rita Ackermann
Soph.

03 2009

STUART SEMPLE /



WRITER
Yasmine Bryce

Reintegration pg.143

Tell us about your background in art and design, how did you end up doing what you do today?

I've been drawing since I was a very tiny child, my grandmother painted too and her house was filled with her impressionist style paintings. When I was 7 or 8 my mum bought me some proper grown up paints (the ones in tubes) and I started using them straight from the tube with a stick to make copies of Van Gogh pictures. I never really stopped making stuff. Then I went to art college and I loved design but I also loved painting, so I sort of started blurring what I was learning in both. I was studying at Bretton Hall in the middle of nowhere in the Yorkshire countryside when I suddenly got ill. So I left, and started painting on my own and carried on from there.

What does pop culture mean to you? What are your thoughts on today's pop culture. How does it evolve in your eyes if at all?

I don't think there's a direct evolution that I can trace, I think if anything there's a random chaotic nature to it. It means a lot to me, there's everything in there. It is a supposed reflection of our reality, but it's a very skewed reflection isn't it? It's not really the truth. I think it's incredibly powerful because we start to believe in it and fulfill it in the real world. I love the escapism it offers, it's entertainment though, it means a lot of good memories, and it's motivated me. I think we've become so accustomed to it, and so used to living with it that we find it hard to distance ourselves from it enough to be properly critical. I think that's really what's changed, the novelty has certainly worn off and it's had to become more and more controversial, sensational and spectacle driven in order to illicit the responses it used to. Therefore it's had to become darker and a bit more sinister, I think the nature of celebrity and fame is a good example of this, where we are more intrigued by the demise of someone than talent, the dirtier and more shocking the story, the better.

You use a lot of people in your works and have them in surroundings that bring up an emotion of fear or isolation. Why

is this? Tell us about this personal approach and what you are trying to get across.

I'm interested in people, and I like painting people. I'm also interested in making pictures. I think that when I see a person in a work I can identify with it more, I can experience maybe how they feel. To me a good picture is about form and content, a balance between the two. I'm trying to get that right. I feel like the people are in reality, and the surroundings are popular culture, and there's a big gap between the two. There's always some distance between what mass culture is promising, or elevating as an ideal situation and what we really feel. The myth offered by the image world is pretty much only obtainable by some kind of consumption of the image, even if it's simply an acceptance. The point is that if pop culture actually totally satisfied our desires it would be unnecessary. So what results is a longing and an isolation. It's not really our language yet we feel that it is.

What is your typical process when developing a work? If there is one?

Well there sort of is. I am doing a lot of things at the same time. I collect a lot of imagery; I also produce a lot of imagery, through photoshoots and cataloguing my findings on the computer. Then I'm collecting music, that may have a certain feeling to it, and I catalogue that. Then there might be a lyric one-day that sparks a thought and I'll start composing elements from that library of stuff on the computer. I have several of those digital collages going on at one time. Growing. Some take years. Then when I feel one is there enough to start actually painting I'll go into the studio and use that as a guide, but I'll deviate from it a lot. I have lots of different music on when I paint and I try to channel those feelings into different passages of the works. Then I normally put a painting away for a while. Photograph it back into the computer, and then maybe work into it again. They can be revised loads of times. Painting a bit out. In the end I either decide that it's done, or that it didn't really work, in which case it gets rolled up and stashed away. Even those ones can come out again and get sorted out later. I just sort of keep doing that.





Some of your works include text and symbolism, what is the reasoning for this? I think text is really powerful; it gives things a whole different meaning. It's like

titling a work but it's on the surface, I love typography and letter forms. I find that words conjour images in the mind, I think that gives an experience to the work beyond what's depicted. You can create tension that way, by really twisting the narrative of something. Most of the time they are song lyrics, and if you know the song I like to think you hear or recall the song in your mind, that way the text provides a soundtrack, like I have when I work.

You live in London which is a city renowned for it's fast paced, hustle-y nature. Does some of this energy end up in your work? Do you see this a negative quality to live in? How does the city affect you and your work?

I actually don't have a very hustle life at all. I have a little house and I have a studio by the canal. I stay very much within the area I'm in. I have noise and commotion so I very rarely go places that are too busy. I'm here because I'm close to things that I need, art materials, storage and the studio space is good. If I had

a choice I wouldn't be here. It's hard to feel totally alone in the city and that's a feeling I like.

Having exhibited all over the world, both solo and group shows, where did you enjoy the reaction from your audience the most? Who empathized with your work the most?

I seem to get on best in Italy. I'm not really sure why they like the pictures more than other places. I think maybe they have a history of looking at pictures in a slightly different way or there's something they can identify with.

A lot of people will have first heard of you from your works RIP YBA, can you tell us about how this came about and a little about the works?

Well I went to see a big show that Saatchi threw when I was 17 it was called Saatchi and my art school put us all on a bus for a couple of hours to get there. It changed my life because I wasn't aware of what art could really be before that. Then one night I was watching the news and this big storage warehouse had burned down, and a whole lot of that work, and other important things had been destroyed. It was really sad. Things by Hirst, and Emin and Chris O'Neil. It felt to me like the end of an era. You can't get those pieces back. Then weirdly I got a phone call from my friend Uri Geller who had co-incidentally found himself down at the burned warehouse, the foreman there said that Uri could collect some of the rubble he was clearing away. Uri commissioned me to make something from those pieces he collected, a kind of memorial. I don't think I was really artistically ready to do such a thing, but I gave it my best shot. I'm not truly satisfied with what I made, so I would like to revisit the piece, which ended up being fragments inside 8 Perspex boxes that I decorated. In the end Uri decided that it was too important for him to just hang on to, a Japanese corporation wanted to pay a million dollars for it but we didn't let it go, we're still hoping it will find it's way into a museum. I don't really feel like it's ours.

From this work and also more recent work, I have made an assumption that you have strong views about the contemporary art

world, what are your thoughts right now of the culture, and in particular of the UK art scene, which artists are doing things the right way in your opinion?

I do have quite strong opinions about it. It's something I see all day everyday. In the UK and in particular where I am in East London, there's so much going on, there's an amazing community and some really exciting things. I almost can't keep up with it. There are always brilliant new artists coming out of the colleges and projects happening. I think it's changed drastically since the recession; there are a lot of people with their heads in their hands. There's a real sense of struggle now. It's not going to be easy for anyone. I'm optimistic, there's no doubt that artists will continue to make art. I did have huge problems with the speculation that was going on, I thought it was very unhealthy for art. So in a way I'm really glad that those people are gone and perhaps we can get back to a more humble time. I do think a lot of the artwork always was about the work and about art, but there were aspects of it that weren't, those are the places that are suffering now. I think when you start making work for a market, or getting into production line luxury goods stuff you're not really an artist anymore.

Your recent Happy Cloud exhibition in London certainly made a big statement, can you tell us about the inspiration and thoughts behind the works?

I was reading a book about the 90s art scene in London. How really the area I'm in now was a slum and actually how central artists were in re-inventing this part of the city. Before that we didn't even have the Tate Modern yet. Which I think is an incredible thing. To be able to see that quality of work for free, unbelievable. So really the arts in England, in a contemporary sense have only really been buoyant for a very short period of our history. With the Olympics coming and the recession it's easy for funds to go away from the arts. But cultural industries are huge parts of the economy, besides artists externalize how we feel, which is vital. So I wanted to find a language to make a very definite and positive statement, a way to show that art has a power to entertain, to capture the imagination and that it can be



relevant in that debate. So I used these modified snow machines that they use for Hollywood movies but these ones have soap and helium, all eco-friendly. We pushed that substance through a stencil, to create over 2000 smiley faced clouds that floated up from the Tate Modern towards the finan-

cial district. They were bright pink. I was also listening to Pink Floyd a lot at the time, and I was thinking about their flying pigs.

Many of your works and concepts are based

around either exiting the traditional gallery system, or in some cases entering through blocked doors (smuggling works into Saatchi), what are your thoughts about the way the traditional art world caters to showing its art, and also around making art accessible to the masses?

I'm not against the traditional artworld, it can be a hugely supportive structure and there are some really compassionate and visionary people there. But art itself is bigger than a system, or a building or a way of doing things. Art deals with absolutes. I think that it's hugely important that the broader public have access to art. I always worry that it's easy to present art with some sort of elitist language around it, or present some community project that goes the other way. Visual art, can communicate on the same level as pop music and gossip and TV shows, and that's not a bad thing. I think we need to find new ways to communicate and I think it's easy to reject things as being non-worthy that perhaps don't fit in with traditional notions of what art or the gallery system is. I think overall though art's there for those who want to find it. I don't like the way that art is forced upon people who have no interest though, or no way to understand it, it alienates them. I think an ideal situation is one where the wider public not only feel able to consume and understand art but to articulate artistic responses of their own, in their own language, I think that would be truly empowering. I think the Internet is key in achieving this two-way communication.

Can you tell us about what your plans are for the coming year?

I've just had a little boy, so I'm taking things a bit slower and planning on spending as much time as possible with him. I'm working on some pieces for a solo show in Hong Kong in October, and plodding away with a collaboration with the Prodigy that I've just about finished. I'm also planning another piece of public art and working on a longer series of things that I've been doing for the last couple of years. I'm hoping to spend some time in a little cottage in the mountains outside Milan to investigate a religious miracle and make some paintings up there.

ARE YOU A RAGING MEGALOMANIAC?
FIND OUT ON PAGE 48

Esquire

IN BED WITH **MEGAN FOX**

BY MARK LAWSON
**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW &
ONLINE VIDEO**



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**TAME YOUR
WORKLOAD**
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**STAY ALIVE IN
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Popular Culture and the Aesthetic Discourse

Stuart Semple

STUART SEMPLE IS KNOWN FOR HIS WRY SOCIAL COMMENTARY THROUGH HIS COLOUR-INJECTED WORKS. THIS APRIL, HE OPENS HIS NEW SHOW, *THE HAPPY HOUSE*, AT MORTON METROPOLIS IN LONDON.

Contemporary image-making is rife with critical debate. It always has been, in fact, that's part of its definition, but combine that with an overarching analysis of popular culture, and the consequences of the recent recession, and this result is a new compelling sense of urgency. Following in the footsteps of Andy Warhol, Barbara Kruger and Jeff Koons, Stuart Semple (b. 1980) turns popular culture on its head by critiquing it through his own vernacular, and so themes of disillusionment serve to deconstruct the very world in which we live, producing a series of meta-narratives that attempt to redefine our comfort zone. Semple is a pro, he joins aesthetic discourse with the acidic residue of consumerism, which is not only thought-provoking, but also serves as an acute reminder to the current state of play.

Semple's latest offering, *The Happy House*, inspired from Siouxsie & The Banshees' song of the same name (1980) will open at one of London's newest galleries, Morton Metropolis, this April. In his first UK solo exhibition in three years, Semple returns to the city where he first became recognised for his politically charged satiricisms, presenting his most personal collection to date. *The Happy House* offers a glimpse into the artist's past and a much-longed return to his natural, colour-fuelled style. Semple's latest series also signals a new era, as he reveals provocatively illustrated works in which his wry social and political observations are entwined on each canvas.

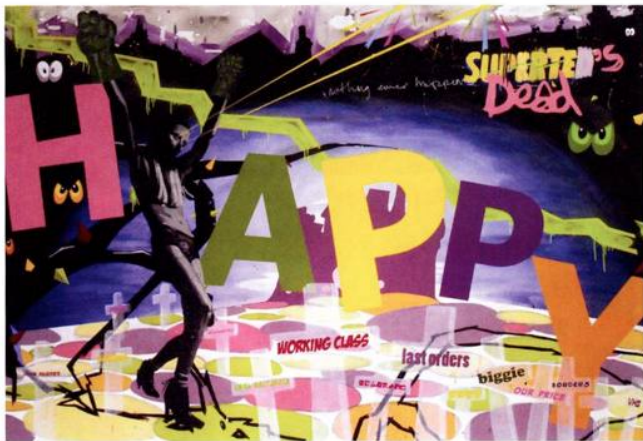
In the aftermath of tumultuous recession and with the general elections looming in Britain, Semple commands the undivided attention of his audience, removing the veil of conformity from the eyes of an idle and meek society. Semple forces viewers to question the extent to which contemporary culture can impact upon everyday lives. In *Comfortably Numb* there's a sense of sadness, as we say RIP to Borders, Cool Britannia, and even the mixed tape, but there's more to it than that. Ultimately, it's a re-evaluation of our value systems and

disengaging appropriated meaning. Semple subverts these systems through a distinct juxtaposition of colour, image and text.

Semple is making images with a purpose; undercutting current trends to engage with the wider social context. Lifting the lid on the state of Britain today, Semple pushes the manipulation of image-making to the extreme; revealing the empowering effect of pictorial demonstrations in an active stand against the "middle of the road" attitude prevalent in today's society and perpetuated through modern media. With programmes like *X-Factor* propagating the McDonaldisation of popular culture, it's no surprise that Semple is angry about the complacency erupting in every *cul-de-sac* in Britain. His work shouts loudly and fluently in the language of a young media-soaked generation, depicting a world that is absorbing and exciting, yet precariously underpinned by the concave cycle of daily tabloids, Hollywood films, Facebook, and a little bird called Twitter. From the macro to the micro, the cultures of consumerism operate on many levels; they are almost omnipotent.

For Semple, it is crucial that his work speaks to audiences on an emotional level, inspiring a response that transcends the limits of the work itself and encourages a critical re-evaluation of daily life. In *The Happy House* the homogenisation of culture is the backdrop for the exhibition. At once, we must question the artifice of the image, and how it intervenes with globalisation and interrogates the associated power structures. Semple does not create work to be consumed along with popular culture but reverses and redefines the power of these memes to reveal a narrative of deeper human interaction.

At Morton Metropolis, Semple's compilation of 10-12 large-scale paintings will flow like tracks on the bygone mixed-tape. Alive with intense imagery and a direct humour they make no attempt to obscure meaning.



Q&A with Stuart Semple

Your work has been received with great acclaim over the past few years with *Fake Plastic Love* (2007) and *Everlasting Nothing Less* (2009) gaining widespread attention, can you tell me how it all began?

I suppose the attention started at the *Fake Plastic Love* show, which was pretty frightening, putting on a show that scale would be hard not to notice. I still can't get my head around the fact that 10,000 people came. But it really started in 2000. I started making a lot of work and I wanted to get it out there, so I put it anywhere that would take it – bookshops and cafes. Most of the time nobody bought one. While I was at university (in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park) I got really ill and nearly died – after that the work just kept coming. I started selling these works on eBay, remember in 2000 it was the bare bones of the web, we were still paying by the minute for dial up. But every night I sold three and people would turn in at the same time every night, and before I knew it there was a fledgling online community. I made and sold about 3000 pieces during that time, mostly they sold for £20 - £30, so I wasn't rolling round like an art star, but the landlord was off my back.

Much of your work is an analysis of popular culture, yet you critique it through its own language, can you tell me more about this decision?

When I think about pop-culture, I think primarily about images, moving images and static images. That's the language I'm fluent in, and while English is a language for me, I think pop is another one; it might even be my first. So it's natural to use that for me. The beauty is that it's a shared language so it's quite efficient at relaying a concept, more so I think than more abstract ways of saying something. The point is that a lot of that pop-culture world, and the images that surface from it do a really good job of pretending that they reference reality. The fact is that they are manufactured, normally with a goal focused purely on consumption, either of the image itself, a product or lifestyle choice. We start to become what we see, and we assume this environment. We camouflage ourselves to fit in, it's self-fulfilling. The point is that I'm trying to make a definite contribution to image-making, but I'm also trying to be truthful and critical.

What are your main concerns about today's society and how does your work define and explore these anxieties?

My main fear at the moment is one of alienation and a type of ghettoisation, one in which there's a sort of bland, homogenised, middle-class with super safe aspirations. This is what we've told we should be, this is what's perpetuated. Where the fringes are reduced, where we'll all be okay as long as we adopt a certain ideology. Fundamentally it doesn't work like that, we still have a huge amount of poverty in this country, we still have a working class, we are part of a bright and varied community but a lot of it doesn't conform to the ideal, so it's hidden. I like the idea of a glossy West End gallery exhibiting an image of Poundland, and I can show something where people wouldn't normally expect it. I'm so lucky with the gallery actually they are probably the first I've found that really understands what needs to happen. They are brave, they are as much for the artist and the culture as they are for the collector. You don't normally see that. The art world couldn't be further away from what I'm talking about. The works are about the majority of our population, so it's like the camera angle changes and I hope you see how limited that frame has been for so long. So in the show you see suburbia, where I was brought up, and you see me getting beaten up outside Poundland.

Your work transcends art, as you move between divides in contemporary visual culture, most notably fashion and art, can you tell me more about the fusion of these two worlds?

I can't see a difference anymore. For me, it's about finding a route to voice something, it's still art for me if it's critical. There's no grand plan, so if I need to learn a new skill or jump over a barrier into a neighbouring discipline in order to carry on that's what I do, and I find myself almost organically stepping back. I decided a long time ago that I would do whatever the work needed from me. One day I'll be on my hands and knees with a fine paint brush for 16 hours and the next I'll be photographing a rock star going on a mission to a paint lab to get a formula to do what the work requires. I could even have to learn new software or painting techniques. I'm not running the thing; it's totally running me.

W.E.

WestEast

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ART

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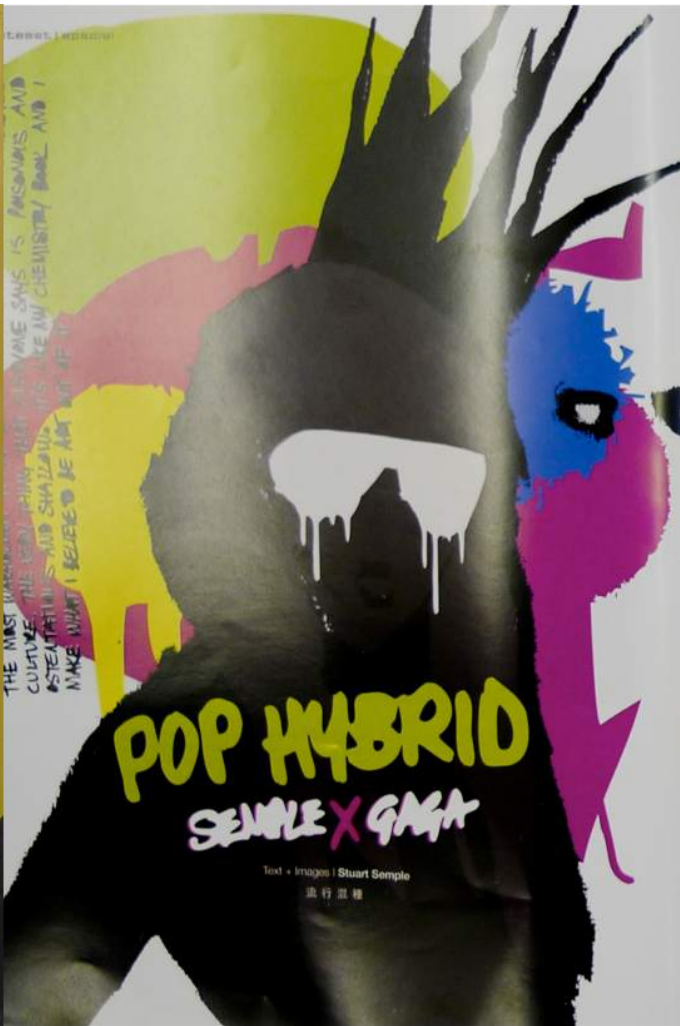


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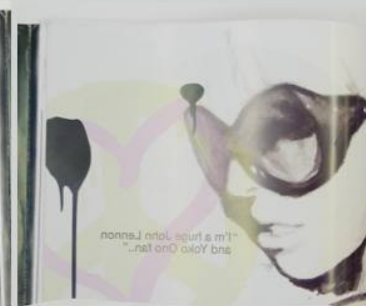
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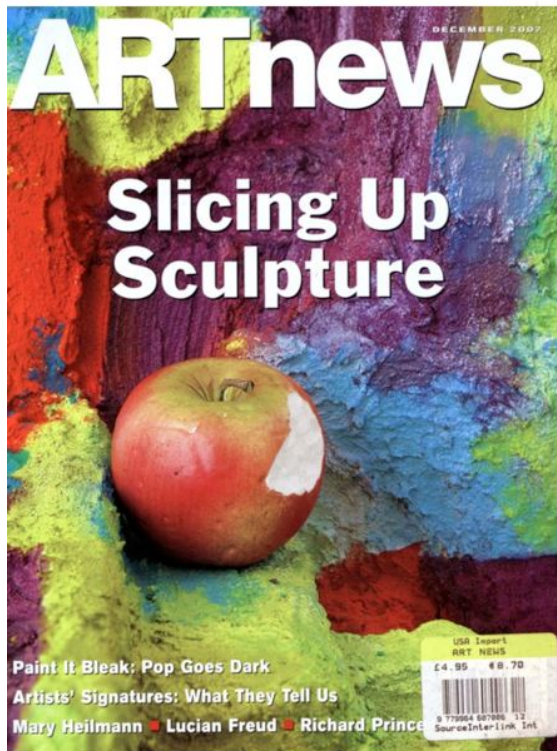
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Paint It Bleak: Pop Goes Dark

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PAINT IT BLEAK

Contemporary artists are taking Pop in a new direction, with violent, angst-ridden, and disturbing works that comment obliquely on celebrity and politics **BY ERIC BRYANT**

press, but artists today are more likely to be on the attack. "Celebrity is both the food and the cannon fodder of these artists," says Neville Wakefield, who curated last year's "Defamation of Character" at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, which presented Matthew Barney's defaced magazine-cover portrait of actress Julianne Moore alongside work by McEwen, Lowman, and others. "These artists are latter-day iconoclasts, and celebrity has become the source of the iconography, so there is a negative relationship, but in a way they also need these objects to ridicule."

The British artist Stuart Semple, 27, who had his fourth solo show last fall at Martin Summers Fine Art in London, makes some of the most recognizably Pop paintings. He draws almost exclusively from pop-culture sources for his often large canvases, on which he collages



ABOVE Stuart Semple's *Thou Shalt Not Remain*, 2007.

everything from images of Kurt Cobain and the anime character Mighty Atom to song lyrics like Bob Dylan's "no direction home" and company logos. But his often disturbing, even sinister works also feature guns, pills, and frequent references to suicide. Repeating a familiar refrain of Pop artists, Semple says, "I am trying to find a language that is familiar to the widest possible audience." With tabloid media offering nonstop coverage of the latest star in or out of rehab, the artist never lacks for material.

When McEwen, 42, went looking for a way to engage with celebrity culture, he didn't turn to glossy magazines or TV gossip programs but to one of the most resolutely gray sections of the newspaper: the obituaries. In a series of poster-size works, he presents what appear to be *New York Times* obits for such celebrities as Nicole Kidman and Kate Moss. The texts are perfectly plausible, except for the fact that his subjects are still alive; McEwen tackles the slaying of one's idols head-on.

Rather than focus on the celebrity machine at the heart of contemporary popular culture, Lowman, 28, likes to dig around the edges; he explores the borders between fame and notoriety, and how we are conditioned to see them. For his 2005



show "The End and Other American Pastimes," he covered the walls of New York's Macarone gallery with images of menacing-looking men with beards, silk screens of angry texts, and paintings of bullet holes, creating an environment that immersed visitors in his two main concerns: bleak humor and violence. Asked about the source of these

interests, Lowman says, "It was all around me. I grew up with Court TV and the Simpson trial and serial killers like 'Night Stalker' Richard Ramirez." Indeed, the ubiquity of

LEFT *Untitled (Little Bighorn)*, 2007, from Adam Helms's series memorializing insurgents of years past.

brutal and tragic imagery throughout contemporary culture may well be at the root of this generation's ability to refer so matter-of-factly to gun violence, suicide, and carpet bombing.

Lowman's two favorite topics are most succinctly integrated in the bullet-hole paintings. They reproduce in larger scale images from magnets he found in his Brooklyn neighborhood that can bring a comic-book version of violence to any metal surface. Though he talks about the works in formal terms—how he took on the series to prove he could make a "real modern object" and how the outline surrounding one magnet makes it "more cartoony and Pop"—the content is as charged here as in his more overtly political *Higher Powers Command* (2004). That silk screen shows flag-draped coffins barely visible in the darkness of the upper-right corner of a mostly white canvas. The piece is a riff on a Sigmar Polke painting in which the same title is followed by the instruction to paint the upper-right corner of the canvas black.

SUCH WORKS WON'T SATISFY THOSE WHO demand political engagement from artists—their ironic distance, characteristic of Pop, seems to render these pieces about the spectacle of politics rather than specific issues. But it is notable that while earlier generations of Pop artists exhibited a similar love-hate relationship with consumer culture and glamour, this group takes on fear and violence.



RIGHT A still from Kota Ezawa's film projection based on the John F. Kennedy assassination. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 2005.



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STUART SEMPLE

At the 'Industry' Semple is capturing the busy scene of the art world, and the people who are the lifeblood of the industry. He is surrounded by people who are the lifeblood of the industry, and the people who are the lifeblood of the industry.

Photo: [unreadable]



Semple's 'The Industry' is a busy scene of the art world, and the people who are the lifeblood of the industry. He is surrounded by people who are the lifeblood of the industry, and the people who are the lifeblood of the industry.



Semple's 'The Industry' is a busy scene of the art world, and the people who are the lifeblood of the industry. He is surrounded by people who are the lifeblood of the industry, and the people who are the lifeblood of the industry.



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Stuart Semple on How It's Hard to be a Saint in the City



View Slideshow

Courtesy of the artist.

Stuart Semple, "Fated to Prehend," acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 2012

by Mary Agnew, ARTINFO China
Published: February 17, 2012

At the age of 8 Stuart Semple came face to face with Van Gogh's "Sunflowers." It was — the British-born artist, curator and gallerist says — as if "a bomb went off in my head." This early experience sparked an interest that would define his youth and inevitably inspired him to be an artist as an adult. In the years after his Sunflowers moment, adolescent ill health and a naturally reclusive nature would lead him to spend large amounts of time on his own. The sense of isolation and remoteness that this engendered formed Semple's aesthetic and in his current show, "IT'S HARD TO BE A SAINT IN THIS CITY," provides its main narrative too.

Whether he is working on canvas or paper, with foam sculptures or with readymades, Semple draws a picture of a loner shouting back at an unjust world in vivid, hyper-real language. Referencing song lyrics and movie quotes, his angst is palpable. Semple took ARTINFO HK on a guided tour of the exhibition.

Tell me about the title of the show, "IT'S HARD TO BE A SAINT IN THIS CITY?"

Well it comes from a Bruce Springsteen song. When he sings it he says "it is hard to be a saint in this city," but I changed it to "it is hard to be a saint in this city." I am not specifically speaking about Hong Kong, I am more talking about London because that is where I made it. And thinking about sometimes how it is hard to be yourself and maybe your experience of the world is different from how everyone else sees it. There is this idea that someone is trying to do something but the environment that they are in is at odds with it.

Do you think that is a common sentiment in major cities nowadays?

They can be very lonely places, big cities. You can have millions of people and you can feel quite alone. A common theme in my work is isolation and atomization and what I mean by that is, you have mass culture and at the end of the day you are a singular person and rather than bringing us together it often works to isolate, because we have become passive consumers of culture.

But yet your work is very in touch with pop culture and what is happening in the media at this time.

I actually have a further belief that popular culture can be utilized as a language that we can all share. So pop culture, as a language, is something that we can share about how we feel emotionally. So I use that as a visual language to talk about our stuff.

I believe it is an individual thing. I think it is like a cultural DNA. You might be two-thirds Lady Gaga, one-third MGMT with a bit of a David Lynch movie. Everyone has their own mix. It is like your iPod playlist versus my iPod list. They may be very different but there will be commonalities and that is the bit where we find the link and I think that I am lucky because that is the way that people can find a way into the work.

Do you feel like you are sort of a social scientist?

Yeah, there is a definite sociological aspect to the work. My mum is a sociologist. I was brought up with a lot of talk about how societies work and how communities assemble. I have always found the products of societies interesting, i.e. the culture and the bi-products. The things that rise to the surface.

Has that always been your basis for creativity? Is that something you ever see your self moving away from?

For me it would be like trying to learn another language. I grew up watching MTV and pop videos and cover art. That is my language, like the way I speak English. If I were to do something else it would not come naturally. I feel like it would be dishonored.

Is there any section of media that engages you particularly? Is it music or film?

I think the experience of each is unique. But for me music is the most emotive. I think there is something about music that cuts straight to my emotional wires. When I paint I use different music to make me feel different things and you can see it in the gesturing.

How is making a show like this? Is it a work in progress?

If I am honest, I never really like what I make. They are all very personal things. Sort of hanging pages of your diary on the wall. It all grows organically. I have a massive blackboard in my studio and everything that comes up is written there and it becomes the building blocks of something and then slowly images might get attached to them. It all grows from there. It is the first few that are always hard and then you find a rhythm and then it is normally the last few that I am pleased with the best.

How has your perception of what it means to be an artist changed from when you first graduated?

Completely different. Totally different! When I was in college becoming an artist wasn't a job. You would cut your ear off and die drinking meth. It wasn't a respectable thing to tell anyone. Not like it is now. This was before Iirst put a shark in a tank. Now it is really exciting. There are so many things to experience. Being into art is a lifestyle now.

"IT'S HARD TO BE A SAINT IN THIS CITY" opens today and runs through March 16 at The Cat Street Gallery at The Space, 210 Hollywood Road, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Click on the slideshow to see some of Semple's works and read his commentary on how they were made.

PHOTO GALLERIES

It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City - Stuart Semple Says Why



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Stuart Semple with "An Answer to Every Prayer You Ever Said," Hong Kong door readymade, 2012

"They work like an antidote poison. They have a specific taste to them. They are all my poetry. There are all my narratives. The reason I am using them is that there is a strong art history linked using these kind of objects. There is something about these objects. They are the heritage of folklores. They have a heritage. I am bringing them back here something similar. I am saying I want to know how you feel about it. What is your relationship to it. The best is like a painting. There is an artist hand to it. People have messages on objects. They are a means of communication. I am trying to make these messages concrete by creating images with the text."

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PHOTO GALLERIES

It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City - Stuart Semple Says Why



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Stuart Semple with "Prail," Foam wall sculpture, 2012

"There are about embracing imperfection. They are super high tech to make, they are computer cut on laser, but to me they are paintings. They are things before would say to you but they are painting as a sense. Words like pink and blue are all self only. They are almost it. It is embracing these particular results. It all comes back to this idea of confusion, of attachment. It is always me as well. I don't believe anyone can make art that is not about them."

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PHOTO GALLERIES

It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City - Stuart Semple Says Why



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Stuart Semple, "Fated to Prehend," Acrylic & charcoal on canvas, 2012

"I have a lot going on at my studio at one time. Often they get away and then come out again. They start as items on the blackboard and then go on the computer and then I assemble images together. Sometimes they live on the hard drive for a long time before I start to paint them."

It is about ideas and how cruel they can be. It is like "Land of the Pharaohs." They are attacking in bright colors. It is really about painting and taking pleasure in the act of painting. It is very guttural. Once you start painting you have to let the process take you over."

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Wednesday, 28 April 2010

London. Evening Standard

WITH MY 53 ALLERGIES, I'M AFRAID TO SWALLOW

Stuart Semple is 28 and a millionaire artist but nuts almost killed him, as he tells **Liz Hoggard**

THIS IS the fluffline of my EGG showing where I officially died, my vital signs zeroed completely," Stuart Semple tells me, pointing to a green line that bisects his new painting, *Nut Job*. A contemporary British pop artist who has been compared to Warhol and Basquiat, Semple is collected by Sienna Miller, Lady Gaga and Debbie Harry. At 28 he is a millionaire. His canvases—which incorporate text and music lyrics—both celebrate and critique consumer culture. He has collaborated with The Prodigy, as well as designing jewellery and clothes. "I'm expecting an enfant terrible with clever hair."

But in person Semple is warm and genuine as he knows all about vulnerability after a near-death experience caused by an unknown nut allergy. He officially died for several seconds. "Up until that day I was a normal kid, I went to art school, I was like everyone else... Then I had this awful week when I had a huge allergic reaction, my tongue swelled up so big I could hardly breathe and I found myself in a hospital bed, dying."

As part of a blood transfusion he was given plasma but he had a major reaction to it. "The doctors told me there was not very much they could do." He had to say goodbye to his mother—"that's not a normal thing," he says, voice faltering, but overnight his body rallied: "I remember thinking while I remained conscious that should I survive I will really become an artist."

He's still never had a final diagnosis. "The hospital shipped me out to this university guy in an ambulance. I got some crazy list of 53 things I was allergic to—tomatoes, celery, pineapple, cucumber. But it wasn't specific enough. Yes, peanuts will probably kill you, but you're also allergic to bees, but we're not sure

how much." Semple was grateful to be alive but as a result of his experience he developed phagophobia—a fear of swallowing. "It was so bad I was terrified to drink from a glass in case someone had just eaten cucumbers." It became hard to trust other human beings.

The irony is the symptoms of panic are the same as an anaphylactic attack. "You feel like you're choking, your heart rate increases." At first he'd call an ambulance several times a week but refused any more medication. "My body chemistry was all over the place, the last thing I wanted was some weird drug."

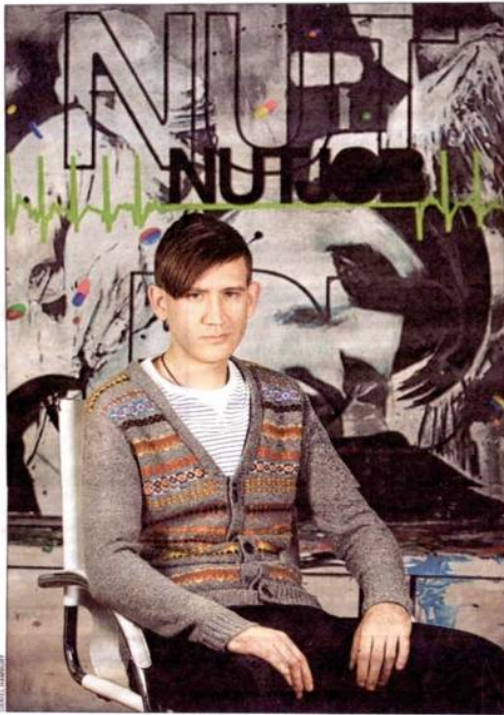
Instead, Semple fuelled all his energy into painting and began exhibiting in bars and clubs. He put drawings on eBay, where they sparked a bidding war.

By then aged 21, Semple got his first solo show in London. In 2004 he made a memorial work from £10 million worth of British art destroyed in the Monart fire. A year later he smuggled his own painting into the Saatchi Gallery, protesting at the absence of British artists in one of Saatchi's exhibitions.

But 2007 was the year he became an art superstar. For the Frieze Art Fair he filled the Truman Brewery with *Fake Plastic Love*, an exhibition of gigantic billboard-size paintings, and the show broke \$1 million sales within the first five minutes and attracted more than 10,000 visitors. The *Financial Times* declared him "The Basquiat of the Noughties".

He's still level-headed about fame. "If no one buys another painting, I don't care because I might die tomorrow."

At his studio near King's Cross canal, full of books and canvases—and, incongruously, a cake stand with pink and yellow Fondant Fancies (sugar is one of the things he can eat)—he admits socialising is hard with his condition. "I feel awkward when there's a group of dealers who want to take me out somewhere



Stuart Semple: "If no one buys another painting, I don't care because I might die tomorrow"

'Up until that day I was a normal kid... Then I had this awful week when I found myself in a hospital bed, dying'

posh and they order me the God knows whatever cod and I'm looking at it and thinking: 'I'm going to drop dead.' He sticks to mashed potato and grilled fish or steak and chips, but then they bring it out with salad, "and then I'm Mr Pussycat, moaning artist. I get on a plane and I'm scared when they dish out nuts that air is going to be circulating for eight hours with nuts in it."

Semple, who has a nine-month-old son with his long-term partner, an ex-fashion model—"She came round to model for

me and never left"—loves cooking for friends. "But when it comes to putting the food in my mouth I don't enjoy it at all," he says in his first interview about his swallowing phobia.

Semple can charge thousands of pounds for a single canvas but he also wants ordinary Londoners to enjoy his work and last year released 2,000 smiley-faced helium balloons outside Tate Modern to cheer people up in the recession. In May he is working with Aubin & Wills—which is opening a clothing out-

let, retro cinema and gallery space (curated by Semple) in Shoreditch.

Nearly dying has given him the leeway to address taboos in his work, but would he trade fame for one day of eating normally? He pauses: "Food is still a functional thing for me. But I've ended up with this strange faith in the order of things. I can paint, I have a great family, I'm happy."

■ Stuart Semple's new show, *The Happy House*, is at Morton Metropolis, 41-42 Berners Street, W1, May 6-28.

Arte & MERCATO



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Michaël Borremans, *The glaze*, 2007, cm 83,5x71,5, olio su tela, Zeno X gallery, Anversa.

di Cristiana Campanini

Spagnolo, terra e fuoco

REGGIO EMILIA. *Aria, acqua, terra e fuoco* è il titolo della mostra che fino al 1° maggio alla galleria 2000 & Novocento (via Emilia San Pietro 21, tel. 0522-580143) riunisce le opere di sei maestri nella conversione di



Giuseppe Spagnolo, *L'Inno*, 2006, acciaio forgiato, cm 150x40x40.

materiali naturali. Ognuno di loro espone due opere site specifiche. Dalla pittura lieve di Marco Gastini ai disegni incisi nella terracotta da Luigi Mainolfi. Dal segno rapido di Piero Ruggeri alle carte su tela, con cui Walter Valentini riscrive il percorso degli astri nella volta celeste. Dai legni bruciati di Nunzio ai ferri e alle terrecotte combinate di Giuseppe Spagnolo, che conservano il ricordo della sua terra. Prezzo da 15mila a 75mila euro.

Stuart Semple, giovane inglese, pittore new wave

MILANO. Warhol, Basquiat e Koons sono i numi tutelari. *Sensation*, la mostra a scandalo griffata Saatchi nel 1997, il faro



Semple, *No direction home, particulare*.

a cui tende. Stuart Semple dal 2000 prende la strada della pittura. Ventott'anni, inglese, intraprendente, in tre anni sforna tremila dipinti per venderli su internet. Del 2001 è la sua prima mostra a Londra. Nel 2004 fa discutere riunendo in un'ope-

ra i resti del magazzino milionario di Brit art andato in fiamme. Fino al 10 maggio, per la prima volta in Italia, 20 tele sono da Aus 18 (via Ausonio 18, tel. 02-8375436). **Prezzi da 1.200 euro** (per i disegni cm 30x30) **a 44mila euro** (per tele cm 120x120x7).

Le città di Yoon Si-Young

MILANO. Vedute iperrealiste di città. Tutti riflessi, vetrine, luci, traffico, insegne. Yoon Si-Young, nata nel 1959 in Corea, dopo l'Università di Ke-Myoung si trasferisce in Italia e frequenta l'Accademia

di Brera a Milano. Dipinge città caotiche e nel suo ultimo viaggio pittorico si ferma su Milano, New York e la natia Seul. Dal 17 aprile al 31 maggio da Previtalli (via Lombardini 14, telefono 02-58113090)

espone 25 tele. **Prezzi da 2.500 euro** (per tele di cm 50x50) a 5.500 euro (cm 100x120).



Yoon Si-Young, *New York, 2007*, cm 100x120.

News

15x15. A Forte Belvedere

Ha ospitato mostre prestigiose, da Henry Moore a Fausto Meloni, da Mario Corbelli ad Arnaldo Pomodoro, Mimmo Paladino e Jean Michel Folon. È il Forte Belvedere a Firenze, alle spalle del Giardino di Boboli (via di San Leonardo: orari, dal martedì alla domenica, 14-18,30, ingresso libero). Fino al 4 maggio ospita una nuova edizione di 15x15, 15 gallerie espongono 15 artisti, uno ciascuno.

Arte del XX Secolo presenta Giuseppe Gazzo; **Pier Giuseppe Carrà** il porta Sabrina Milazzo; **Rosanna Tompasetti** Fritz Angeli De Nozza; **Santo Ficarra** Gianfranco Zappettini; **Fritzel** il **arte contemporanea** Paolo Maso; **Gianni Riccancio** Guarnieri; **Guastalla** la **Centrosarte** Massimo Garzanti; **Open art** Roberto Fiorentini; **Sassanna Orlando** Pino Deodato; **La Subbia** Jessica Carroti; **Poggiali** e **Forconi** J&Peg; **Il Ponte** Mauro Detti; **Aurelio Stefanini** Roberto Malquori; **Tornabuoni** Arte Luigi Carboni.



WAR OF WORDS
Salman Rushdie's life under a death sentence

SNOW BLACK
Why Kristen Stewart likes to live dangerously

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ART OF DARKNESS

When 23 decommissioned AK-47s — the most efficient killing machines in the world — were handed to Damien Hirst, Jake Chapman and fellow artists, the results were explosive. **Paul Croughton** reports. Photographs by **Bran Symondson**

In his youth, Lieutenant General Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov dreamt of being a great poet. He went on to produce six volumes of verse, and although his work has touched the lives of millions around the world, he's not known for his writing. In 1947, while serving in the Russian army, he put his name to something else: the Avtomat Kalashnikova assault rifle, aka the AK-47, the most efficient killing machine ever produced.

There are now roughly 100m AK-47s in use worldwide. Rather like the Eames chair or the Anglepoise lamp, it is a design classic: simple, effective, with no extraneous frills or complications. It's engineered for one purpose, so that ordinary men, women and even children can use it to kill each other. And, from Sierra Leone to Syria, Darfur to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they have.

These days the Lieutenant General is an old and decorated man, long used to protests about the slaughter he has helped, indirectly to perpetuate. It is unlikely. ➤



BLOOD MONEY
Left: Bran Symondson's rifle, loaded with oil, cocaine and other spoils of war. Below: Symondson's story of the Afghan soldiers who inspired the project, on the cover of the Magazine in July 2010



'IT STANK OF WAR. I DIDN'T WANT TO TOUCH IT,' SAYS STUART. 'I KEPT THINKING HOW PERVERSE THIS IS'

however, that any protest has ever involved his rifle being cradled by a small child with a face full of genitals. The protestors in this case are, perhaps not surprisingly, Jake and Dinos Chapman, the British art scene's most infamous provocateurs. Later this month, Jake will curate an exhibition of 23 decommissioned AK-47s that have been handed over to many of the (formerly) Young British Artists who rose to prominence in the mid 1990s, such as Damien Hirst, Antony Gormley and Sam Taylor-Wood, international artists such as Nancy Fouts and Laila Shawa, and newer names such as Charming Baker and Antony Micallef. Some have incorporated the weapon

into larger sculptures; others have painted it, defaced it, augmented it, neutered it, and, in one case, pulverised it. The works will be shown at the ICA in London in an exhibition entitled AKA Peace, before being auctioned in aid of Peace One Day, a nonprofit organisation that campaigns for a global day of truce and non-violence on September 21 each year.

The idea came from the photographer Bran Symondson, who served in Afghanistan as part of the reserve force in 2009. While there he noticed that some

younger Afghan soldiers took on a feminine role within their platoon. "They would paint their eyes and hands, be very effeminate, and have sex with the commander," says Symondson. "And, just as teenagers here might pimp up their cars or bikes, they decorated their AK-47s, putting glitter tape and roses on them." Symondson's photographs of these boys appeared in this magazine in July 2010. "When I was out there next I took some stickers for them, and straight away they put them on their guns. That was when I thought about taking AK-47s and turning them into art back home."

Symondson contacted the Peace One Day founder, Jeremy Gilley, who got in touch with Jake Chapman. Sitting in his studio in east London, surrounded by various half-finished pieces of sculpture, taxidermy and other works, Chapman should be an intimidating presence — he's a big guy with a shaven head and numerous tattoos — but he is gently spoken and erudite. He says involving other artists was surprisingly easy. "I've tried to get people together before to fight the student-fee issue, but you can't get people to agree to any kind of political demonstration for fear of impinging upon their careers. This was completely different. I had a list of artists, sent them a

link to the website, and the deal was done." The piece by Jake and his brother, Dinos — the children with phalluses for noses — is designed to shock. "They're nasty little child soldiers with AK-47s, which actually isn't too far from what we know happens. What we've done is fuse some of the very obvious elements of our work with these guns. The amazing thing about guns is that they maintain their integrity no matter how you hold them. They're phallic objects that people can't decide without thinking. 'Ooh, this is great.'"

Some of the artworks make overt political points, others are more subtle, but the range of ideas is considerable. Tim Noble and Sue

Webster have tied a knot in the barrel of theirs; Damien Hirst has used his as a canvas for a paint spinning. Antony Micallef has used two guns on a vast canvas to depict the horns of an animal's face; Charming Baker has riddled his too with what look like bullet holes, while the photographer Symondson has covered his in burnt dollar bills, and turned the bullets in the gun's magazine into glass tubes, filled with commodities from war zones — gold, oil, diamonds, cocaine.

Stuart Sempé, a young contemporary artist whose work often has a cartoon-like quality that belies its dark themes, used graffiti and stickers to create something almost playful.

"I stank of war. I didn't want to touch it," he says of the moment he received his gun. "I kept thinking how perverse this is, somebody has created it — drawn it, cast it, made it. It's very similar to making a sculpture, but its intention couldn't be more opposed to what

I'm trying to do. So by decorating it, if felt like an inversion."

Sam Taylor-Wood had a similar reaction. "It's the strangest thing to hold something you know has probably killed quite a lot of people," she says. "My immediate thought was to embed it in concrete so it can never be picked up and held in that way. But as soon as you hold it you're almost stroking the wood. It's that strange dichotomy of it being a beautifully designed, tactile object as well as being utterly horrific."

One of the most luxurious works in the gun by Solange Azagury-Partridge, a Swiss-Peruvian jeweller who makes bold, bright pieces that she calls "audacious modern vintage". She imagined petrifying the weapon, as if it's been left lying around and turned into beautiful stone. All the wooden parts have turned to lapis and all the metal has become malachite. And I do love a rainbow, so instead of shooting out bullets, it's shooting out rays of light." It's undeniably beautiful, and you can almost ignore the deadly outline that remains.

Peace One Day began 14 years ago when Gilley was, he says, confused about the world. "I didn't know if human kind was fundamentally evil or if the destruction of the world was inevitable." As a film-maker →



NOSES TO THE GRINDSTONE
Top left: Stuart Sempé covered his weapon with stickers and graffiti, as if it were a skateboard. Top right: Jake Chapman, who is curating the exhibition AKA Peace, with his 'nasty little child soldiers'. Left: Gavin Turk grinds his AK-47 to a pile of dust



Artist spreads cheer over London

More than 2,000 pink smiley faces - made from helium, soap and vegetable dye - have been released into the air.

Artist Stuart Semple, 28, filled the air outside the Tate Modern gallery in central London with the Happy Cloud Installation on Wednesday.

He said he wanted to create something that would cheer people up and to "contribute happy to the atmosphere".

Each of the faces lasted about 30 minutes before dissipating.

He said: "I've had enough of the doom and gloom in the air and I wanted to show something completely positive floating up in the sky.

"I am hoping it might put a smile on a few people's faces as they go through their day."

He said he wanted to show on a very human level that an artistic idea might be able to do something important.



Each of the pink, smiley faces lasted about 30 minutes

ENGLAND'S BIG PICTURE



Reveal image

METRO 26.02.2009 metro.co.uk



THE TIMES

Storm clouds give way to smileys over London



(Richard Pohl/The Times)

Happy face foam clouds float past the dome of St Pauls Cathedral in the City of London

Kaya Burgess

The clouds that linger over London are often described as dark, threatening and stormy, but rarely are they described as "happy". Until today.

More than 2,000 smiley-faced pink clouds were today released over the capital from outside the Tate Modern on London's South Bank.

The artist Stuart Semple, who created the Happy Cloud installation, said: "I just wanted to make a piece of work that could cheer people up a bit. I've had enough of the doom and gloom in the air and I wanted to show something completely positive floating up in the sky."

The 2,057 clouds - made of helium, soap and vegetable dye - drifted over the Thames and the City of London. One was released every seven seconds from eight o'clock this morning, and the eco-friendly clouds lasted 30 minutes before dissolving in the air.

As well as alleviating the doom and gloom of recessions and downturns, the installation aims to show that creative industries have an important role in the economy and should not be neglected during the recession.

A recent report by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts predicted that creative industries will grow at an average at more than double the rate of the rest of the economy this year.

The artist said: "I know at times like this it's easy to make creativity a low priority, but I want to show on a very human level that an artistic idea might be able to do something important, even for a fleeting moment."

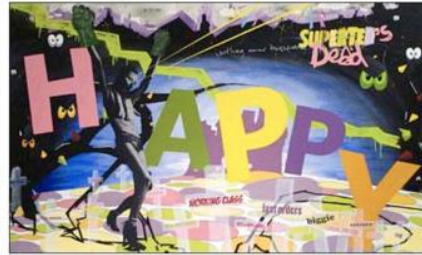
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ENTERTAINMENT AND ARTS

Stuart Semple unveils new works



British artist Stuart Semple unveils his latest collection

ARTS STORIES

-  Picasso work fetches record price
-  Enron play to close on Broadway
-  BBC Prom sales top 80,000 tickets

THE BIG PICTURE



Open Reveal image

Artist Stuart Semple: "It's actually quite mental"



On the eve of a new show in central London millionaire artist Stuart Semple reflects on the city that inspires his creativity.

The 29-year-old has been spoken of as a latterday Andy Warhol for his love of consumerism and pop culture, themes that dominate his work.





GOLDEN POP

Quando è morto Andy Warhol, nel 1987, era solo un bimbetto che disegnava con i pastelli. Oggi, che di anni ne ha 27, Stuart Semples è il ragazzo d'oro dell'arte inglese. Ma, anche se la sua ultima mostra londinese ha venduto opere per mezzo milione di dollari, lui resta un uomo semplice, riservato, con i piedi per terra. A dispetto degli occhi truccati e di un provocatorio ciuffo alla Duran Duran

di PIA CAPELLI

A destra. Il dipinto *I've Been Fucked!*. In alto. Stuart Semples nel suo studio.



La prima cosa che tutti dicono di Stuart Semples è che sarà il Damien Hirst del futuro: a 27 anni, con quotazioni che superano già le 125 mila sterline per una tela e le 75 mila per un disegno, questo artista inglese sembra proiettato verso l'olimpo dei giovani d'oro. Ma la prima cosa che penso quando lo incontro a Londra, durante la settimana di Frieze, fiera dell'arte contemporanea londinese, è: "Devo assolutamente farmi spiegare come fa a truccarsi gli occhi così bene". Perché Stuart è un personaggio fuori dagli schemi, che riesce a coniugare un forte carisma artistico a un'immagine glamour e una grande semplicità di atteggiamento. Il che fa sì che tutti lo adorino a prima vista. Con un lungo ciuffo asimmetrico che scende a coprire un volto dal make up glitter, e il fisico efebico infilato in golfini attillati, sembra uscito di peso da una band degli anni Ottanta. Ma negli anni Ottanta, anzi proprio nel 1980, Stuart ci è nato. Curioso dunque che su quel decennio stia costruendo un'estetica pop di fortissimo impatto visivo, che colpisce i critici, attira i collezionisti e soprattutto ha convinto un gallerista di peso come Martin Summers ad allestire per lui una doppia mostra intitolata *Fake Plastic Love* (www.fakeplasticlove.co.uk) andata subito sold out. «Sais, mi spiega Stuart, «Martin l'ho conosciuto per caso al barbecue della principessa del Kent». L'inaugurazione dello show, tenuto all'interno della Truman Brewery



A sinistra: Coloni scultori per Suckerlove. In basso: Incubi di oggi per Fanny Optimistic.

in Brick Lane, è stata presa d'assalto da pubblico e vip, e ha venduto opere per mezzo milione di dollari durante la prima ora d'apertura. Il giorno successivo raggiunse Stuart sui docks della periferia est di Londra, dove la sua luminosa casa-studio si affaccia su un fumiattolo pigro con gli anatroccoli e ai suoi studi d'artista, gallerie e stamperie d'arte. Con la sua aria tranquilla sembra quasi vulnerabile nella sua disponibilità a raccontarsi, mi dice di amare le interviste perché «quasi nessuno gli fa domande stupide» e parlare lo «aiuta a pensare» a quello che vuole fare. Questo temperamento pacato esplose però nelle sue tele gigantesche, lunghe fino a sette metri. Descrivite come «un cocktail pittorico di cultura pop», sono composizioni dove icone, simboli e personaggi di cinema, televisione, moda e musica anni Ottanta sono accompagnati da grandi scritte simil-neon che paiono titoli di canzoni. La mostra londinese è ormai conclusa ma in Italia le vedremo probabilmente nei primi giorni di aprile durante il Miart: in vista della fiera d'arte contemporanea di Milano, infatti, Stuart sta organizzando la sua prima personale italiana.

Come sei arrivato a questi lavori così potenti?

«Ho iniziato da piccolissimo, coi pastelli. Le prime opere d'arte che mi hanno impressionato le ricordo come se le avessi viste ieri: i *Girasoli* di Van Gogh a sei anni, i lavori di Warhol, Basquiat e Haring al college. Poi la mostra *Sensation* alla Royal Academy nel 1997, con la Young British Art dalla collezione Saatchi: Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Jenny Saville. Lì ho capito che non c'è bisogno di morire giovani per essere artisti: puoi essere vivo e fare l'artista, se sai cosa vuoi. I miei nuovi lavori sono il frutto di tutto questo. Sono enormi. Sono ambiziosi. Sono quello che ho a lungo sognato di poter fare. Sono stati pensati in formato "sedici noni", come su uno schermo piatto».

Non sei troppo giovane per conoscere gli anni '80?

«Me lo ricordo benissimo. La morte di Andy Warhol, l'arresto di Boy George, il muro di Berlino, la Thatcher. E la musica!».

Le altre tue fonti di ispirazione?

«Le riviste fashion o musicali come *Billboard*, i video e le immagini che ritaglio dappertutto. Ho un database gigante nel pc. Alcuni dei simboli dei miei ultimi quadri li ho archiviati 8 anni fa».

Come lavori?

«Ogni dipinto nasce come disegno e poi cresce di dimensione. Mi sveglio alle sei, inizio a dipingere verso le sette e mezzo e interrompo a mezzogiorno. Alle tre riprendo e a



"NEL MIO STUDIO, MUSICA NON STOP. RADIOHEAD, PROKOFIEV E CINDY LAUPER. MI DÀ ENERGIA, AIUTA L'UMORE"

volle smetto solo verso l'una di notte. Non ho bisogno di dormire molto».

Come nasce un tuo quadro?

«Costruisco la scena con molta attenzione, uso le modelle come se fossero attrici su un set. Anche il colore è molto importante, mi sono costruito personalmente una tavola digitale fatta di sfumature tutte mie».

Hai dalla tua galleristi potenti e amici che animano la scena fashion di Londra. Il tuo rapporto con la celebrità?

«Mi interessano le celebrities perché le voglio dipingere non perché voglio diventare uno di loro. Diventare famoso adesso è proprio la cosa che mi interessa meno: lo voglio solo essere normale e disegnare».

Hai 27 anni, sei quotatissimo. Non sarà facile tenere i piedi per terra.

«Se hai buoni amici e una famiglia intorno, qualcuno prima o poi ti avvisa se stai cambiando. Poi io sto bene solo, non esco molto, al massimo una cena con amici, non mi piacciono le discoteche».

Londra è il posto giusto per te?

«Sì, amo l'East End. Qui di fronte, vedi, al di là del ruscello, c'è lo studio di Peter Doig. E nell'isolato dopo il mio ci sono la galleria di Victoria Miro, la Parasol. Certo l'affitto costa più che a Berlino, ma ne vale la pena».

Stai per lanciare anche una tua linea di vestiti...

«Se mi dedico solo alla pittura dopo un po' perdo energia e tendo a distrarmi. I vestiti li ho sempre disegnati, ma la moda mi interessa come immaginario».

Ti trucchi sempre?

«Sì, giocare con la mia immagine mi diverte. Non è una cosa deliberata, faccio un po' di casino con i cosmetici».

Dietro il questo tuo plomb c'è un animo ribelle. Come quella volta con il guru del paranormale Uri Geller, o quando hai fatto irruzione alla Saatchi Gallery...

«Con Geller, che è un amico, è stata un'operazione di re-

"SONO MOLTO INTERESSATO ALLE IMMAGINI DEL NOSTRO MONDO. VOGLIO VEDERE TUTTO"

cupero. Quando nel magazzino del Momart è scoppiato un incendio e sono bruciate molte opere di artisti come Damien Hirst e Tracey Emin, abbiamo comprato quello che rimaneva, e l'abbiamo riassembleato. Per noi, anche quella era un'opera d'arte. L'abbiamo proposta alla Tate Modern ma nel frattempo sono sorte polemiche e la cosa è stata giudicata troppo controversa per essere acquistata. Ma non è ancora detto... Invece con Saatchi me l'ero proprio presa. Lui ha collezionato e fatto business per 15 anni con la Young British Art, poi un giorno ha organizzato una megamostra senza inglesi dichiarando al *New York Times* che quegli artisti sarebbero stati solo una nota a piè di pagina nella storia dell'arte. Allora, ho scritto con la vernice su una tela "British painters still rock" e sono andato a piazzarla abusivamente in galleria».

Di cosa parla la tua pittura?

«Cerco di descrivere il paesaggio culturale intorno a me. La cultura pop è un ottimo strumento per descrivere cosa sentiamo. Tutti conoscono Britney Spears o Gucci, possiamo usarli per dire chi siamo. Alcune campagne pubblicitarie di moda sono vere fotografie della società. Migliori a volte di quelle che si vedono nelle gallerie d'arte».

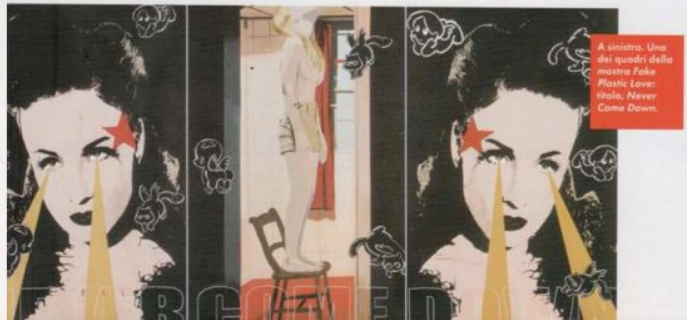
C'è qualcosa di politico nella tua visione?

«In un certo senso sì. Ma non è importante».

Dove vorresti essere tra dieci anni?

«Nella mia casa in campagna, con la mia famiglia intorno. Sono un tipo solitario, anche malinconico, sono nato povero e non ho bisogno di possedere molte cose. Preferisco guardarle che comprarle».

Pia Capelli



A sinistra: Uno dei quadri della mostra Faintly Love: In the Never, Come Down.

the *arts* desk

Stuart Semple, Morton Metropolis

Sunday, 09 May 2010 20:28
Written by Josh Spero

Print | E-mail | Comment



Almost vibrating with tension: 'A Pounding Outside Poundland' by Stuart Semple
Stuart Semple Industries

Sincerity is not a quality the contemporary art world seems to value: the masking of emotions under layers of irony is where we stand. But while Damien Hirst paints from a cynical palette, British Pop Artist Stuart Semple's Nineties-inflected paintings have sincerity to spare.

The Happy House, his new show at Morton Metropolis and his first in London for three years, combines the commercial tropes of Pop Art as refracted through a certain naughtiness with self-portraits both visual and emotional.

This is clear in the show's outstanding picture, *A Pounding Outside Poundland*, where Semple recreates the time he was assaulted outside the titular mart. It has the shrinking awfulness of the enthusiastic Poundland logo ("yes! everything's £1"), the assailant in a skeleton tracksuit and mask, glaring at the viewer, and Semple in a *kapow!*-style stagger, complete with neon flashes to exaggerate the force.

The way in which Semple plays with the time scheme – the skeleton has already hit him and turned away, while he is in the instant after the blow – gives each figure much more potency and individuality and puts the event in a permanent state of happening, the canvas almost vibrating with this tension. The cartoonish power-lines try and inject some levity but serve only to heighten the tension, like a weak joke at a wake. That this is all taking place outside Poundland makes it that bit grimmer even as Semple is mocking it.



Anything before 2008 suddenly seems appealing, as suggested by titles like *Comfortably Numb* (pictured right) and *Killing Me Softly* cribbed from golden oldies; the crosses emblazoned with "Our Price", "Biggie" and "Working Class" in the former picture hark back to what is no longer with us.

These are very much post-recession works, disdaining the indulgent Noughties: there is a tiny Jeff Koons balloon-rabbit in silhouette in the far distance, and one of the decade's stars, Kate Moss, is a cheap and corpulent patriotic stripper in *Welcome to Middletown*. (Nostalgia is, after all, free.) Pairs of suspicious eyes taken from the cartoon *Trapdoor* hang around the canvas, while the word "HAPPY" in emetic colours and manic-depressive arrangement suggests we are anything but.



In *Killing Me Softly* (pictured left), Semple layers a message to a former lover over what looks like a Harajuku Lolita in front of a distant forest. Each letter of the message is in a different colour (in one of the matt paints he has designed especially for his work), dizzying the viewer as the girl stares out from behind huge red sunglasses.

The message in part reads "Maybe... you'll see me as I paint this song", and that captures what Semple is doing with this exhibition: by melding wide-ranging cultural references

with an intense emotionality – finishing this painting with "I miss you... Good luck, Goodbye xxx" [sic] in his own script – and his vital yet sensitive technique, he is making Pop Art personal.

- Stuart Semple: *The Happy House* is on at Morton Metropolis, London W1, until 28 May



KEEPING IT SEMPLE



“ I like the idea that you're always challenged when you go into the gallery, you'll often see something unexpected ”

STUART SEMPLE, CELEBRATED ARTIST AND CURATOR TAKES TIME OUT FROM RUNNING THE AUBIN GALLERY TO TALK TO US ABOUT NURTURING RISING TALENT, BUYING LOADS OF ART AND DOING IT FOR THE SHEER LOVE OF IT

Do you find that being an artist yourself informs your decisions as a curator?

Being led by artists makes a huge difference to how we approach things because I know how I would dream of the walk to work. I work differently to other curators in the sense that I work closely with the artist rather than the object. You tend to find that a lot of curators start with the object and try to fit it into a certain theme and concept for the show. I am hands-on with the development of the artist, I work with them up to a year and half before the show, to help them realise and visualise what they might get by the end - it feels very collaborative. I've found if you want a really good show you need to get to know the space and the artist really well so you know that when the work arrives in the space that it will work. It's so important to work with the artist otherwise

you risk getting whatever's left in their studio and that's no good.

What sets the Aubin Gallery apart from other galleries?

It's an artist-run space and that's exactly what sets us apart. Other artist-run spaces in the area tend to be small. By comparison we are quite large but we have retained our artist ethos. We're fortunate to be supported by Aubin & Willis because it means that we don't have to worry about the same problems as other galleries, we can take more risks and show some really good stuff that you might not otherwise get to see.

Does the Aubin Gallery prescribe to any particular genre?

Galleries generally become defined by the artists they show, the thing about the Aubin Gallery is that it's quite eclectic and in a lot of ways that's almost its identity. I like the idea that you're always challenged when you go into the gallery, you'll often see something unexpected. I don't want it to be one of these galleries where everything is the same and you know what you're going to get, essentially you have to come in to see for yourself.

Helped by events like First Thursdays in East London, art seems to be getting evermore accessible but how do we discern what's good?

I think it's great that people are becoming a lot more discriminating, they don't just go

to the Tate anymore. There are loads of commercial galleries now but in a way that makes it more difficult to deliver something interesting that encourages people to come back. You've got to learn the ropes a little bit and be selective, a lot of it's about having a good eye when you are looking out for new artists. I think Redchurch Street is a vibrant place and it's good that people come here to look at art. It's a genuine community, it's not a contextual thing.

What's next for the gallery?

The future for the gallery is about keeping the quality up. I feel as though I've finally got the space how I want it and now I want to see it grow. I want to work to establish events that involve the whole store a bit more, to really make the most of the great opportunity we have here, it could involve screenings in the cinema with exhibitions in the gallery. When Placebo launched their new music video, we hosted the first play at the Aubin Cinema and then we all congregated in the gallery and that had a real buzz.

What's coming up?

Next we've got a group show for Little White Lies, the theme is deception in art. One of the pieces we're exhibiting is a fascinating and hyper-real creature made out of taxidermy, about the size of a cat and looks like a fluffy white cow. We've also just recently started holding life-drawing classes where we tie in each session with the show that's exhibiting; for

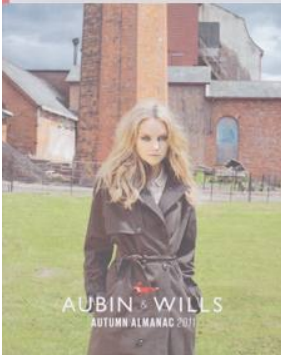
a recent show we dressed the model in a great headpiece. It's a really fun night, everyone gets a glass of wine, the materials they need and the exhibiting artist gives a talk.

What are you up to in your personal work?

I am curating a huge show at the Old Vic Tunnels underneath Waterloo with Tracey Erin, Sebastian Hawley and the Chapman Brothers to raise money for Mind (the mental health charity). We've created a grant for Mind to send people who are struggling with anxiety, stress and depression to creative therapy throughout England and Wales. On the opening night I'll be hosting a gala dinner with Stephen Fry and Melvin Bragg. That's my big project but I am also planning a big performance piece on the South Bank for the Olympic committee and also a big show in Dallas with Damien Hirst, Nick Knight and Peter Blake.

How do you find the time?

I love it and you can always find time for the things you love doing. I like working with other people, I am happy to paint on my own for 14 hours a week but then after that I need some interaction. The art world is a big cycle, I buy quite a lot of art, if I sell a load of art, I then buy a load of art, it feels natural to do that. When some artists I work with can't pay their studio rent, it seems simple to me - buy a piece of their art and they'll be fine for a few months! It's such an obvious way to work.



AUBIN GALLERY

The Aubin Gallery can be found on the top floor of our Redchurch Street concept store and although opened less than a year ago the gallery has already showcased a plethora of

talent from 20s French surrealists, 80s rock to the multi-disciplined illustrator Danny Sanoja, even works by heavy hitters Damien Hirst and Pablo Picasso have graced the

Aubin Gallery's walls thanks to the "Heavenly Creatures" group show. As well as being a regular hot spot in Time Out's First Thursday events, the gallery has played host to a variety of parties including the superbly dapper Twined Run after-party.



Aesthetica

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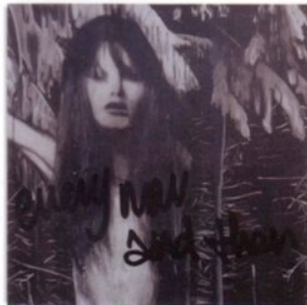
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news



An exhibition on the implosion of popular culture

Stuart Semple: *Everlasting Nothing Less*
Anna Kustera Gallery, New York

As an Aesthetica favourite, Stuart Semple launches his much awaited first New York solo show exploring the disintegration of mass culture at Anna Kustera Gallery. Semple has been recognised throughout Europe and Asia, South America and the USA as a pioneer of a new generation of British artists. He has also earned raving reviews and top sale prices at recent exhibits and biennales, a great distinction for an artist not yet 30. Curating *Mash-Ups* last year at DACS and the *Hippy Cloud* installation this year, Semple has engaged the art world with his post-Pop mantras oscillating between installation, printmaking, and fashion (even working with Selfridges). Defined in the words of Art Forum's critic Adam Genderson as "the offspring of Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, as styled for MTV," it's not a bad place to sit.

What's around the corner for Semple is rather exciting; his new show *Everlasting Nothing Less* charts the rise and fall of the reproduced image and human created spectacle. He adds a deeper, darker, and intriguingly beautiful dimension. Undercutting the Pop Art elevation of reality to immortal status, these new works, including several large-scale drawings, installations and paintings, draw on the Second Law of Thermodynamics in which everything must necessarily return to equilibrium. As such, the stellar rise of over-night celebrities, the dizzying proliferation of icons of popular culture and the mechanisms for recording and transmitting them result in decay and ultimately destruction.

This powerful series of works exposes the viewer to shards of the pop culture that we invest in daily as reality. The central image of the

show is the fallen star, the archetype of submission and dominance. The fragmentation and distortion of the images, reproduced and manipulated, point to their inherent instability so taking the viewer on a visual journey to regain their independence. With the hard reality of a recession emphasising the entropic nature of economic systems this show is a fascinating expression of the zeitgeist.

"They pretend to be screen prints, just as screen prints pretended to be photos, and photos pretended to be life. For me that whole thing creates items that people invest belief in as if they were real but in fact aren't a true reflection of reality; they never will be. They are constructs, and the logical thing to do is to make another construct that shows the falling in the previous ones," Semple contends.

Semple's painstaking attention to detail in his meticulous hand painting of what at first appears to be machine reproduced silkscreen halftones, not only alludes to mechanization in early examples of Pop Art, but clearly display his preoccupation with retrieving items from mass culture in order to re-humanize them.

Semple creates many ambiguous spaces, which explore the grey area between mass culture and individualism. Ultimately his work reflects the modern state of affairs: worry, concern, loss, globalisation and homogenisation. Semple offers you the chance to decide where you sit. Snack dab in the middle of cultural hypochondria or complacent within the nature of the modern world. It's up to you. *Everlasting Nothing Less* continues until 20 June. For more information on Stuart Semple visit www.stuartsemple.com or www.annakustera.com.

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Two editions Semple and his acrylic and charcoal on canvas painting, *Faded in Painted* (2012)

Stuart estranged

British artist Stuart Semple – who has been dubbed the “Basquiat of the noughties” – talks to **Yasabelle Cheung** about Hockney, Russian oligarchs and being an artist in the postmodern age

Stuart Semple died when he was 19 years old. A life-threatening peanut allergy resulted in his heart flattening for a few seconds – what he calls “the most terrifying experience you could ever imagine”. What occurred after the temporary scotching of his existence led to a life-long dedication to his art. A jumpstart in eBay auctions (the sold more than 3,000 paintings), walking into the 2005 Saatchi exhibit to implant his own painting in a revolutionary guerrilla attack on the art system, creating *RIP Y&A* (Young British Artists), a box which contained ash from the destroyed works of Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, releasing powder-pink smiley

face clouds from above the murky waters of the Thames – all of these milestones seem insignificant when you listen to Semple, now 31, who talks to *Time Out* from his cavernous London studio, while quietly meditating on the values of art. “I’ve always made art. It’s always been there for me. I think art has been put on the back burner for at least 15 years. There’s a heart in it that we’re really lacking, there’s a human aspect to it that painting and art can do that other things can’t.” We’ve interrupted him in the middle of an art session. It seems, but, polite as ever, he apologises profusely for not waiting by the phone. “I completely forgot. I was

in here at seven this morning,” he says, instantly debunking the myth that a lackadaisical approach to art is the way of the 21st century – and that bad monomers are a pre-requisite to controversial fame and glory.

When we mention the current debate splashing front pages – the Hockney vs Hirst debacle that has stirred up sour feelings about skilled art technique and contemporary concept art – Semple becomes understandably ignited in his argument. “It’s quite sad. It was crass and a bit ignorant to talk about the hand of the artist or the idea that the artist could create something spiritual. But I can’t begrudge anyone for using systems to make their work. That’s ludicrous, that’s like asking an architect to build their own church with their own hands.”

But surely, we suggest, there’s some truth in Hockney’s statement as well, that contemporary

artists are relying on other skilled individuals and companies to create their work without training in the basic aesthetic skills? “At the same time, that’s true. The thing is, we’ve come to a time now where the actual output of art has become so much more extended. It isn’t just about drawing or painting. There’s fantastic painting that’s been going on since the cave paintings. I can think of hundreds of fantastic living painters.”

And how about the Jarokowski superyacht that was the centrepiece of the 2011 Frieze art fair in London? The arrangement caused a near media frenzy when it became clear that its quoted selling price was \$65 million and, for an extra £10m, you could buy it as a work of “art”, complete with a plaque and a certificate. “There’re other things to be dealing with,” Semple reflects. “Yes, we know there’s a recession, and yes,

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Culture needs freedom in order to progress and we need to be able to adapt what’s come before us



Angry and awkward (above) *Fluorescent Absorbent* (five-color screenprint, 2011); *Hard to Be a Saint in This City* (oil on canvas) (below), 2011



we’re told that the art world is a very exciting and spectacular place with multi-million pound Russian oligarchs rolling around, buying stuff. That’s fine but that doesn’t really help us as artists and as people who look at art and are interested in culture. Other people have dealt with the idea of art and commerce so many times before – and better – so what’s a boat got to do with it?”

Semple’s latest exhibition in Hong Kong, titled *It’s Hard to Be a Saint in This City*, renders nostalgic images of the 1990s and of his own formative years. *How Soon Is Now* is splashed in faded neon-block letters on a canvas painting; the sound of a basketball in a gymnasium reverberating through the traces of a geek’s mouth is spelled out in rainbow magrets on a vintage refrigerator. “At school I was a very strange kid,” says the artist. “I was obsessed with rock and roll music and edgy pop music, like Joy Division and Echo and the Bunnymen. It seems to me that text has the power that pictorial representation doesn’t. They become an almost sculptural medium and I think song lyrics

in particular have an almost emotionally to them. I’ll be listening to music and then I’ll start to get visual ideas.”

The state of art and copyright is at stake, especially now, where creativity seems to be fading into the quicksand current of technology. Being a renegade character on the DACS (Design and Artist’s Copyright Society), Semple is fully aware that behind the so-called ‘copyleft’ law, his work may be distributed, copied and altered multiple times. “I think that culture needs freedom in order to progress and we need to be able to adapt what’s come before us. If you believe the idea that we’re in some postmodern place where hybrid things are all that we’re able to make, then it’s vital that, as artists, we have materials that we can have access to incorporate into new formats and I think that’s how knowledge progresses.”

It’s Hard to Be a Saint in This City is at The Space Feb 17-Mar 16

timeout.com.hk/art



ARTS

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UPCOMING

It's hard to be a saint in this city

British artist Stuart Semple first began intently dedicating himself to art following a near-death experience aged 19.

From paintings to foam sculptures and repurposed retro fridge doors, Semple's work remixes and incorporates elements from pop and mass culture, thus critiquing humankind's consumerist, modern lifestyle. Feb 17-Mar 16. The Cat Street Gallery, 222 Hollywood Rd., Sheung Wan, 2291-0006.