

behind the WOW

Trish Tillman



What is your work about?

It was photo day. The uniform was basic third grade kid. I had a purple corduroy jumper with a matching vest. The American flag hung in the background. When school let out that day, Mrs. Klein reminded us about career day on Friday—wear what you want to be when you grow up. There was an article in the Washington Post about this artist with crazy hair who worked like mad and hosted parties all the time. I begged my mother to find me a black turtleneck, and I wore it to school that Friday with one of her kitchen aprons. I was a girl on the baseball team, got good grades, got along with everyone. Suddenly I was teased like crazy, put into a category, and everything became doors and windows. Boundaries. I learned it was harmless and fun to straddle both sides. Authenticity. What does that mean? That's where my art stems from—borders, the transition between stages, places, feelings, and what that in-between looks like. I'm always excited by the mystery of that gray area, and that's what keeps it really interesting for me. It keeps the work growing, changing, and vulnerable.

Tell us how you conceived of this piece, how the idea came to you, and then how you set about executing it. Any other thoughts or research that informed the work?

I was working with found furniture, specifically the legs of broken, dumped living rooms. The worn, decorated wood had such history, stained and painted several times, and that guided what I did with them. They were like talismans or trophies, like my grandfathers war medals mixed with the kitchen chair he sat on for years. I was thinking about that crossover, the utilitarian object becoming a status symbol. I wanted to switch it, to make the status symbol a type of household object, give it a function. *Marquee* is one of the first pieces I made with really pared down materials. These plain chrome fittings for bathtubs and bars, cars and kitchen cabinets were so cold and so attractive. They are void of any history, clean slate, accentuating banal functions like turning on a faucet or holding rope for crowd control. In *Marquee*, I knew I wanted to use this Americana rope. It reminded me of a carnival and I just bundled it up around this beautiful long ponytail like a tassel. But then I felt like snipping all the loops, the rope was so silky and so much fun to cut. I was thinking parade, decorated soldier, shoe polisher, sexy tuft, and then I cut the ponytail too, like a commemorative cleaning brush.



Where is your studio located? What is your routine/ritual like, from the moment you enter the space until you leave? Walk us through a typical day at work.

My studio is in Bushwick, North Brooklyn in New York City.

I'll DJ some music first thing, maybe some thrashing around to that for a bit, make some tea, and look at what I've got going on. I usually work on 4-6 pieces at a time, so figuring out what needs to be set up for the day is totally dependent on my mood unless I've got a strict deadline for any one sculpture. At around 3 or 4 I take a break. I do a lot of writing at cafes and bars. Back to work with fresh eyes, final push until I head out. I don't do as many late nights as I used to. I miss that, but too much time at the studio sometimes kills the work. You need that balance.



What's the hardest/most frustrating part about what you do? What are your greatest artistic challenges?

I'm challenged all the time—how the hell will I make this thing? I'm always troubleshooting something. Can't say I love the unknown all the time, but I feel lucky when it surprises me—teaches me something about myself. Frustrating? Lately I want to travel everywhere. I usually splurge on materials instead. Maybe this is the next challenge.

What book are you reading now / art blogs do you follow / podcasts are you tuning into / music are you listening to?

I'm reading Viv Albertine's memoir, *Clothes Clothes Clothes Music Music Music Boys Boys Boys*. The stack of books next to my bed is *The Sleepwalkers*, Edward Hirsch; *The Philosophy of Pain*, Arne Johan Vetlesen; *Off the Map*, a collection of CrimethInc zines I picked up ten years ago. I don't frequent blogs—too much time on the computer. Music...today's mix—Cramps, Black Tusk, Doomriders, Motorhead, Stranglers, Dag Nasty, Psycho Furs, Genesis.

Where do you work?

I'm the creative companion for a fantastic gentleman whom I adore. I help with his artistic endeavors, manage his collection of ephemera and get to experience a lifetime of his entertaining stories. I'm grateful everyday.

What's the best title you've ever come up with for one of your pieces?

My favorites are the ones that keep the work playful, give it a push. Dirty Dip. Slow Easy Stride. Road Captain. One time I was at a bar with a friend, we were newly 21. She picked up the band calendar and asked, "Who is TBA—They sure do play a lot." That's why I never label a work untitled.

If you could change something about the art world, what would it be?

Artists making art about art. I'm probably supposed to like it, but I find it so insular and boring.

If you could kick it with any artist, dead or alive, who would it be?

So many—probably someone sassy like Sarah Lucas, David Bowie, Olaf Breuning.