

The works of Joel Ross that whisper bitter truths

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I fought cancer during the last two years and with lymphoma I could not work for a long time. It was terrible. I'm not the same person when I'm away from the studio...

Why did you become an artist?

I was always an artist.

What did you learn as a house dick for a large hotel in Boston about life and society that most people don't know or underestimate?

Prostitution is everywhere.

Make a top 5 of your favorite artists and a short comment for every one.

Favorites change with mood (sometimes daily), but here are 5 artists whose work and careers have had an undeniable impact on my art: Eva Hesse – men and women are not the same vessels, and that changes the way they see the world; Agnes Martin – grids have feelings too; Jenny Holzer – words can be sculpture; Sophie Calle – the artist can still be the character; Cindy Sherman – give the viewer a trail of clues, and then get out of the way . . . one frame, one moment, that's all we usually get to see, and if done well, that's all we need to build a story.

Can you tell us a little about the idea behind "Torture Sounds Incredible," the place and the damage of your work?

It is difficult for viewers to encounter the work without thinking about screaming. It's a visceral piece and a very polarizing one as well. It's meant to get people thinking and talking about 'enhanced interrogation' – a ridiculous term and a method that has no credibility. I was happy the piece got someone so upset, but I was sorry that Okay Mountain took the brunt of the reaction. I wish the sculpture got damaged instead of the gallery window.

Do you define yourself as provocateur artist?

No.

Tell us about the best and worst moment in collaboration with Jason Creps.

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I can't really think of a worst moment. We've encountered setbacks on occasion, but nothing that was due to stress in our relationship. We work very well together. Of course, collaboration is always tricky – working as a team means giving up control over part of the project, and that requires a great deal of trust. I trust Jason with my life, so making art together is pretty easy.



When you are not working on new projects, do you miss something?

Absolutely. I recently fought a two-and-a-half year battle with Lymphoma (I've been in remission for a year now), and during big stretches of that time I could not make work at all. It was dreadful. I'm just not the same person when I'm away from the studio.

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Do you think that an artist has an obligation to society?

Citizens have an obligation to their community. If an artist gets money in advance (grant, commission, residency, etc.) they have an obligation to their sponsor, but to society? Hell no.

Will you exchange your ability to make art with something else?

Time travel.

Think of yourself as time traveler who met your 16-year-old self. What would you say to him?

Spend every spare dime on Apple stock.

Complete the phrases: My life is Art is Happiness is

Sorry, but this question is just too silly.

Your future plans?

Make as much art as I can. Right now I'm working on a new series of twin sculptures – two identical signs/sculptures, one to be left in the world and the other will be displayed in the gallery or museum. I use the same methods I was using with earlier work (dropping signs at various roadside locations without permission) but now there is no photographic record, just a twin and a location in the title that describes where the other twin was abandoned. It's a great challenge. I'll show a few of these at the Rockford Art Museum later this year (Deconstructing the American Landscape, October 7, 2016 – January 29, 2017)

