

SPRAYGRAPHIC INTERVIEW WITH ALYSSA PHEOBUS

April 30, 2008

Spraygraphic's Chuck b. interviews artist Alyssa Pheobus about her amazing drawings, art-making process, and current inspirations behind her work.

SG: Please tell us about yourself?

AP: I grew up in Frederick, Maryland and am serious about westerns. Right now I'm making big drawings about the shifty nature of desire.

SG: Where do you currently live and work?

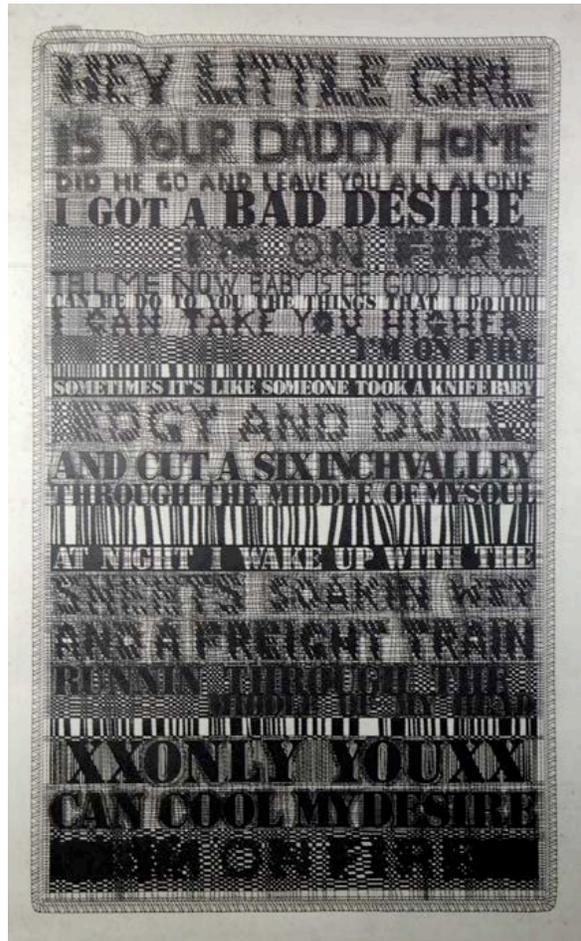
AP: New York.

SG: What mediums do you work with?

AP: My materials change from project to project. For the past year or so I've been drawing in graphite on sheets of tough cotton rag paper that I piece together into larger supports. At the moment I've got some new etching-based print collages in the works, along with a series of burn drawings made with branding irons.

SG: Describe your working process when creating a new work.

AP: I almost always start with a text that has an erotic charge. I'm especially attracted to texts whose sexual politics circulate around fantasies of power, aggression and masculinity. I find material in song lyrics and poetry as well as more casual sources, like conversations. Some texts immediately suggest images that I plan and execute quickly, while others suggest a format but no clear image-destination. These works grow slowly and intuitively. Regardless of the form a drawing takes, my process more or less performs the motions of the various textile practices that inform my imagery. For example, large paper supports are cobbled together from whatever paper I have available, and small, stenciled, stitch-like letter fragments accumulate into patterns and forms.



SG: What kind of things do you do when you get blocked or find it hard to create something?

AP: I tend to dig myself out of fallow periods by inventing rules that introduce new limitations or handicaps that change the way I think and work. I also read, watch movies, travel and listen to as much music as possible.

SG: Where are you currently finding your inspiration?

AP: Jean Genet's amazing memoir, *Prisoner of Love*; Nick Cave and Warren Ellis' soundtrack for the *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*; the proliferation of great westerns in this year's mainstream movie releases, *Brokeback Mountain*; rural American architecture and material culture; textile history; the poetry of Joe Hall and Eric J. Palgon; the feminist criticism and philosophy of Kate Millet and Luce Irigaray.

SG: Can you please tell us a little about your piece, *I'm On Fire*. How long did it take to complete?

AP: This drawing contains the complete lyrics of a song of the same title by Bruce Springsteen . There are tons of songs that represent this classic male fantasy of a daddy-daughter sexual dynamic—but this particular song fascinates me because it's full to the brim with erotic angst and a violent subtext only barely concealed in metaphor. As I was making the drawing I started to think of the laborious process as a simultaneously devotional and penitent attempt to add something critical to the history of the song. You might call it a "signature performance." I worked on it for about two and a half months.

SG: Do you work on several projects at once or do you work on one at a time?

AP: I usually fight off boredom by working on more than one thing at once. This allows for cross-pollination, which makes the process and the relationships between works more interesting.

SG: Can you please tell us about your experience at Columbia University as an MFA student. What do you find most challenging? What do you find most rewarding?

AP: The best thing about Columbia is its genuinely interdisciplinary structure and the diverse array of practices that it brings together. My classmates are fantastic and I hope to know many of them for the rest of my life. Although it took me a little while to catch up to the intellectual orientation of the school I've been thankful for the challenge.

SG: Can you please tell us a little bit about *Rough Sex with a Big Man*? Did you choose the title before or after the piece was completed?

AP: The phrase came first. It started as a joke-answer to a personal question that I won't repeat here. Then it hung around in my thoughts just long enough to crystallize into a problem with a demand.

SG: Where has your work been seen?

AP: I'm still relatively new to the scene but I have exhibited a bit in New York, Chicago, Toronto, and Maine, where I lived for a year. Recently, Face Forward , an exhibition of new portraits curated by my friend, Seth Scantlen at the LeRoy Neiman Gallery at Columbia.

SG: Where will it next be seen?

AP: This spring I'll have work in a group show of finalists from the 2008 London International Creative Competition as well as Columbia's MFA Thesis show, which is being hosted by the Fisher-Landau Center for Contemporary Art.

SG: What is your dream art assignment?

AP: One day I hope to learn how to tattoo.

SG: What is your favorite color?

AP: Graphite.

SG: Who is your favorite artist? And why?

AP: I reserve the right to not answer this question! I admire a lot of different artists for different reasons.

SG: What book/magazine are you reading this week?

AP: *Querelle of Brest*, Jean Genet's very sexy novel about a murderous sailor.

SG: Ever do a self-portrait? Where is it now?

AP: The drawing on view in Face Forward is a self-portrait. There are lots more, all from an earlier body of work.

SG: Where is your favorite place to hang out?

AP: It's a goody-two-shoes thing to say, but I really love being in my studio. I also like hookah bars.

SG: Any final words of advice?

AP: No one knows what's good for you but you.

--

URL: <http://www.sprayblog.net/2008/04/spraygraphic-interview-with-artist-alyssa-pheobus/>