

Rodney Durso

Rodney Durso's career in fine art has been informed by a prolific background in graphic design. He started creating art in 2006, when he moved into his New York City based studio. Since then, his work has taken on new depth and meaning, and he has created a 400+ strong body of work, but his painting and collages are still grounded in a strong sense of graphic organization, colour, type and imagery that speaks to his earlier work as designer. Stories organically unfold as he works, finding a narrative that comes to life with the freedom of creating something new, finding a balance in the unstructured, where nonsensical bits of text, symbols and strokes of colour come together with no purpose other than to elicit feeling. Exploration of self, self-reflection and inner discovery are recurring themes, and Durso considers each piece as a kind of self-portrait. A key part of the artist's process is naming his pieces; the language and words coming directly from what he sees and senses in the work. It is the final act which makes the piece or series complete. Durso has exhibited at prominent art fairs and galleries around the world. He currently lives and works in Chelsea, one of the centres of the art world in Manhattan.

Having worked as a graphic designer, what was the catalyst for turning to fine art?

The catalyst was that I was quite literally burnt out from running my own design agency — having employees, and weekly payroll for a staff — and felt like I wasn't really able to do anything new from a design perspective. I felt creatively tapped out and needed to do something different. Working with commercial clients is a mixed blessing, you have some room for creative expression but inside a set of fairly rigid, pre-existing brand parameters. Those 'guard rails' are very useful in that you know there are certain limitations about what you can do, but ultimately the client's appetite for pushing the creative envelope is really the only limitation. What really pushed me in the end was a confluence of situations both personal and professional. I had achieved what I set up to accomplish, including a four year stint teaching at Parsons School of

Design and winning several design awards, so I thought, time to try something else.

Where do you draw inspiration from when creating new work? Is there a research stage to your process?

I draw my inspiration from many things, and my work is created in a number of ways. Sometimes viscerally — with brush in hand — fuelled by loud music, emotion and caffeine, other times it's more meditative, working in a deliberate fashion. Either way, the work is pulling from feelings and influences from current events, ideas, design, architecture, and music. In fact, I have always been influenced by these many disciplines, especially in the abstract form. For example, I see similarities between the work of Klee, Miro or Kandinsky and free-form jazz, both expressing similar ideas in different mediums — aural and visual. I also find great



Stery-ing, 2008, acrylic and mixed media on paper, 57 x 43 cm



Just Above the Waist, 2015, mixed media on paper, 37 x 26 cm

comfort in the form and shape of good design, and I sometimes bring that love of organization, methodology and hierarchy into my work. As far as research, I have no formal process; in fact I enjoy the not-knowingness of the process. My work as a creative director was very much driven by research, but my fine art is much more spontaneous.

Many of your works feature collaged elements; what's your approach to using found artefacts? Do you have an archive of images to use, or is it more of a spontaneous decision when you see an image - you know you want to use it within an artwork?

For me, collage is one of the most expressive and interesting mediums. I use magazines and newsprint and stick to a few specific titles including: The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, DWELL magazine, iD magazine, and



Prince of Kings, 2015, mixed media on paper, 37 x 26 cm

a handful of the other visually rich and esoteric art and design mags. What I look for is large swaths of colour and texture, usually nonspecific imagery that lends itself to the narrative of a piece without directing the viewer overtly. I also love type and find the use of modern typefaces work well with my art. It may be interesting to note that I only tear paper and images when I'm working. I never use scissors and don't like clean cuts. When I'm working in collage, I feel like I'm channelling some energy, I get into a zone of sorts. I work very quickly and rarely know what I'm creating until it reveals itself as something recognizable, like a face, or body form, or creature of some kind. As far as archives, I do have archives (large envelopes) filled with pieces of cuttings, but tend to ignore them in favour of what's latest on the news stand.



Pink Face Antlers, 2015, acrylic, house paint, photo transfer & plaster on plywood box, 30 x 30 cm



Disfashionate (Green), 2015, acrylic, house paint, photo transfer & plaster on plywood box, 20 x 20 cm



Disfashionate (Orange), 2015, acrylic, house paint, photo transfer & plaster on plywood box, 20 x 20 cm

When viewed together there is an eclectic range to your artworks, however there is a clear visual language that links pieces; do you tend to work on several pieces at once or do you feel you've developed a way of making work that flows to each new canvas?

Yes, I work on several pieces at once, usually in a grouping of three, and occasionally four. What happens is that the idea needs to work itself out. I have to put it down on paper multiple times in order to see where it's going. To an outsider, it might not make sense, but when I see the visual idea there three or four times side by side in front of me, it more or less shows me what the next move is. It's like the work is telling me what to do, and how to proceed. It's all very intuitive — the flow — or seems to be.

What are you currently working on? Do you have any upcoming exhibitions?

Currently, and for the last months, I've not worked on anything new. My work comes in spurts, my residency at the American Academy in Rome in 2016 was particularly productive,

working fast and creating lots of new pieces. At the moment, I am exploring painting branded objects — that's still just an experiment. I've also founded a nonprofit arts organization called ArtBridge (art-bridge.org), that just celebrated its 10 year anniversary. ArtBridge exhibits the work of emerging artists on construction scaffolding. And, in 2009, I co-founded a sister organization in Italy called OffSiteArt (offsiteart.it), which turned L'Aquila, an earthquake ravaged city, into a beautiful public showcase of local, emerging artists using similar display and installation techniques that we developed here in New York. What I'm mostly doing now is participating in a lot of group shows and fairs. My Studio Manager keeps me very busy submitting my work to art fairs and group shows here and abroad. In the last months I've had work shown in Washington DC, Brooklyn, Venice, Italy, ArtBasel Miami and ArtBasel, Switzerland. I've also had recent press coverage in British Vogue

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Candy Plant (I), 2017, mixed media on paper, 96 x 66 cm