

AN AFTERNOON WITH KIM DREW, ART AFICIONADO

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When Kim Drew says she'll take you gallery hopping in the Lower East Side, you don't say no.

A job at one of NYC's most established museums and a degree from Smith College in Art History and African American Studies under her belt, it goes without saying that Drew knows a thing or two about art. She has nearly 100,000 followers on her personal Instagram, and is also the creative behind Black Contemporary Art, a blog showcasing artists of African descent.

We followed Drew downtown to a Martine Syms exhibition at the Bridget Donahue Gallery, and talked to her about her blog, favorite artists and more...



What do you like about the Lower East Side art scene?

I think that the Lower East Side is exciting because there is no one art space that defines all art spaces in the neighborhood. If you go to spaces on the Upper East Side, you get the gist of how art is presented and you get a sense of a target audience. If you go to Chelsea, a lot of spaces are really beautiful, but very similar. But in the Lower East Side, you never know what you are going to get. This dynamism, in a small way, makes way for grander possibilities for artists and for audiences.

What is your favorite Martine Syms piece?

I don't have one piece that I could point to as my favorite, but I am a big fan of Notes on Gesture because I think it showcases Syms's generosity and dynamism as a multimedia artist. The video, as minimal as it is representational, has many layers. I enjoy this video because it speaks to Syms's interest in introducing her audience to new things and new people, like Diamond Stingily, the video's protagonist who is an artist herself.



What type of art has been most influential to you?

I am definitely more interested in artists than artworks. My favorite artist is Howardena Pindell. She is a New York artist who worked as a



practice while she worked there. She is historically significant because she's had both sides of the coin. Pindell was also an activist and a part of different working groups strategizing how to make the art world more equitable. Some of

her work is now in the MoMA's collection.

What inspired you to start your blog, Black Contemporary Art?

Back in 2010, I interned at The Studio Museum in Harlem during my sophomore year of college. During the ten week internship I was blown away by the amount of information that I'd learned. Every day I learned about a new artist or art movement. When I returned to college, I missed that experience and created my blog to both present the things I'd learned and as a means for pushing myself to do more research.

As the blog became more popular I became fascinated with the idea that people could discover new artists on their mobile devices – more specifically, I became obsessed with the idea that art can be with you all the time. I think it's revolutionary that people of color, who have often been or felt excluded from art spaces, can now engage art and art history on their own terms.



What is your all-time favorite piece of art and why?

My favorite work of art is Janet Cardiff's *The Forty Part Motet* (2001). The work is comprised of forty speakers of people with different vocal tones singing the same notes in unison. I cry almost everytime I see (and hear) it.

What has been your most impactful art-related memory?

Five or six years ago, I went to the Brooklyn Museum for the first time. During my trip I visited their Contemporary wing and saw the Kehinde Wiley chapel-esque installation. The room has four larger paintings by the artist. Seeing those works and knowing that these works could provide visitors of color the unique opportunity to see themselves represented was very moving. There is nothing like seeing people who look like you on the wall and there is nothing like knowing that other people will encounter this work and have this kind of revelatory experience as well. In the work that I do on my blog, I'm trying to do everything in my power to continue to build spaces like that.

my favorite museum is the studio museum in Harlem where I worked and started my career. it has an incredibly rich history of supporting artists.



Who are some artists we should have on our radar?

I really enjoy the work of Niv Acosta, who is a performance artist doing a project called DISCOTROPIC (2015) that he premiered at the New Museum's Triennial. I would describe it as an afro-futurist roadshow because it pops up and reconfigures in each space that it occupies. The next iteration of it is going to be an alien talkshow at Cooper Union. I love Niv's work because he is an incredible researcher and a generally a cool dude. I remember in our first quasi-studio visit we just sat, drank and ate pasta.

What artists do you think have shaped our generation?

A lot of people talk about Basquiat, and Basquiat is an amazing artist don't get me wrong, but I feel that more people should talk about David Hammons. He is a great artist because he thinks so intensely about the audience and their relationship to his work as well as the private life of his work in the moments that people aren't around to see it. I also think people should dedicate more thought to the work and critical writing of Lorraine O'Grady. She's a feminist pioneer who wrote about black female subjectivity before we had the language to describe issues of intersectionality. She's a hero to us all.

How do you define beauty?

Beauty is the overwhelming freedom to love one's self fully. Beauty is power and agency.

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