

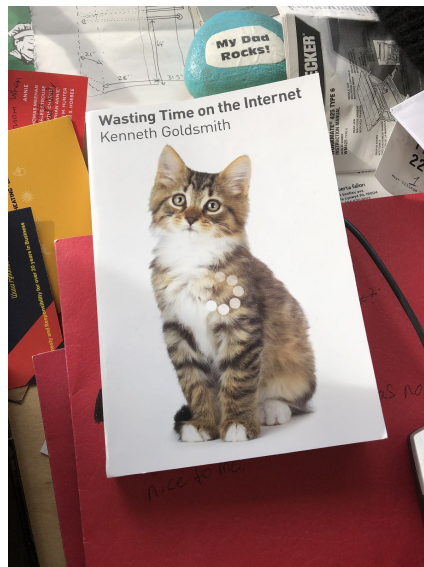
Wasting Time at Galerie Andreas Schmidt

Writer David Evans, Berlin (DE) asks some questions to artists Jonathan Lewis, New York (JL) and Mishka Henner, Manchester (MH). Both have a joint show called *An Act of Collective Faith* at Galerie Andreas Schmidt (Berlin) from 13 January until 31 March, 2018.

JL: Ok so while I am waiting for Mishka to log on I should explain that we decided to answer David's questions simultaneously using Google Docs across the Atlantic. Mishka in Manchester, UK and Jonathan in New Jersey, USA.

DE: What is wasting time on the Internet?

JL: Wasting time on the Internet is the title of a brilliant new book by the brilliant Kenneth or Kenny Goldsmith, depending on how well you know him. Mishka you know him pretty well don't you?



MH: Well, I've met him a couple of times. I wouldn't say that qualifies as knowing him well.

JL: Better than I at least.

MH: Ok, but how's Kenny ended up being the subject of this interview?

JL: I think because we all like him and David clearly does. David once wrote a book about Appropriation.

MH: I don't know what to say about Goldsmith though in relation to our show. He's lurking in the background for sure, but why don't we start with something else? Like, "Why an act of collective faith?"

We could think aloud for a minute and see where it takes us.

JL: Ok. Well it was you who came up with the title.

MH: Was it? I thought Andreas did. He's usually much better at these things than I am. You are too.

JL: He has a talent for titles, true. Although I am pretty impressed with my own title for my eBay self portrait which will be in the show: Cogito eBay Sum. What do you think? Andreas liked it.



MH: It's brilliant. I love the combination of Latin with the dumb, base corporate name of eBay. I've no idea what it means but it doesn't matter. Or does it? Let me look it up right now.

JL: Oh right, have you heard of Cogito Ergo Sum? It's a Descartes thing.

MH: I have now. It's good.

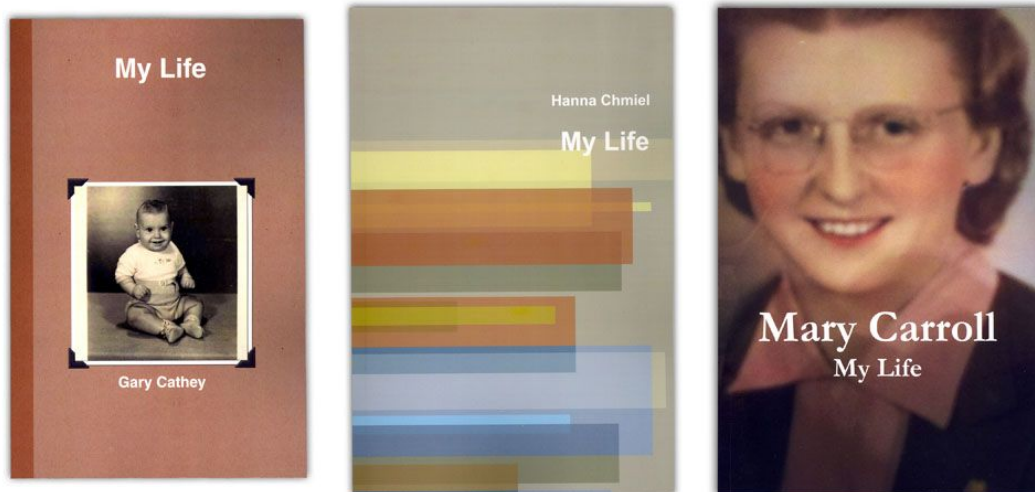
JL: How about you? Which work in this show are you most proud of?

MH: Yours. Pride isn't a word I'm very fond of. Deep down I have a bit of a complex.

JL: Pleased?

MH: I think the series of explosions is good. I laid them out on the floor last night and they looked great. And My Life is good too but I don't know if it's finished or if it's still in progress. I was thinking maybe I should take a page from each book and present them in a sequence, so you'd have page 1 from one book, page 2 from another and so on. It'd be like giving birth to a new life.

JL: Oh yes I think I like My Life the best. Its another kind of self portrait, no?



MH: Yes, I think so. I find other people's lives much more interesting than my own. I love seeing which episodes from their lives they choose to write about. It's a difficult thing to do if you think about it and yet it's fundamental. There's a couple of books in the series that are filled with smut and at first glance, they're the most interesting.

JL: Ha!

MH: You wouldn't believe the detail they go into. I wonder if they're aware someone's bought their memoir or if they thought they were self-publishing it in a void?

JL: I guess some of them think someone somewhere will read it and they will become the next - what's the name of the author of Harry Potter? My memory!

MH: JK Rowling? No, I don't think so. I think the impulse to reflect on your life and memorialize it in a book is probably something quite universal.

JL: Like making art.

MH: Exactly.

JL: Should we illustrate this afterwards? that might be fun.

MH: Yes, we could do that. I could copy or scan some extracts.

JL: Sure. Shall we tackle David's next question? It's about cats.

MH: Well, cats is only one consonant away from being cars, which is what you're showing. What's the name of that work?



JL: Brilliant segue, thank you. Well, I don't think I have a name for the series apart from I keep calling it luxury cars which is pretty boring. The individual titles for each piece though are pretty good. I used the advertising tag lines from each manufacturer so Aston Martin is "Power, beauty and soul", the Bentley is "Be Extraordinary" etc.



MH: They're like chapter headings in a self-help book.

JL: Yes!

MH: Why luxury cars?

JL: Good question. I'm not sure why but I do find myself often drawn to the luxury end of consumer goods as starting points for a lot of my work. Maybe just because it is an extreme? Extremes are more interesting.

MH: Yes, what I find interesting about the luxury market is the amount of effort that goes into selling the idea and the dream. They use the best looking people, which probably costs a lot more money than normal looking people. They use the best ad agencies, which probably costs a lot more money than your local marketing outfit, and so on. All that effort to persuade you to spend thousands on a bag made of dead animal skin that's been put together by tired workers in the Far East for just a few dollars.

JL: Yes and my ironic use of the ad lines, together with extreme pixelation is an attempt to subvert all that. It's my way of 'owning' it all and laughing at it.

MH: How is your use of the ad lines ironic?

JL: Ironic because it's all bullshit. A Bentley doesn't make you extraordinary, or does it?! Maybe it does in these Trumpian times.

MH: I guess if you've got \$100,000 to blow on a car that makes you pretty extraordinary.

JL: True.

MH: But maybe it's more extraordinary not to buy into the ads. I've never really understood how people are convinced by them. Why the pixelation though? Why not blurring or some other Photoshop filter?

JL: I've tried blurring things. I don't like it. Although I have blurred pixelated photos to some success.

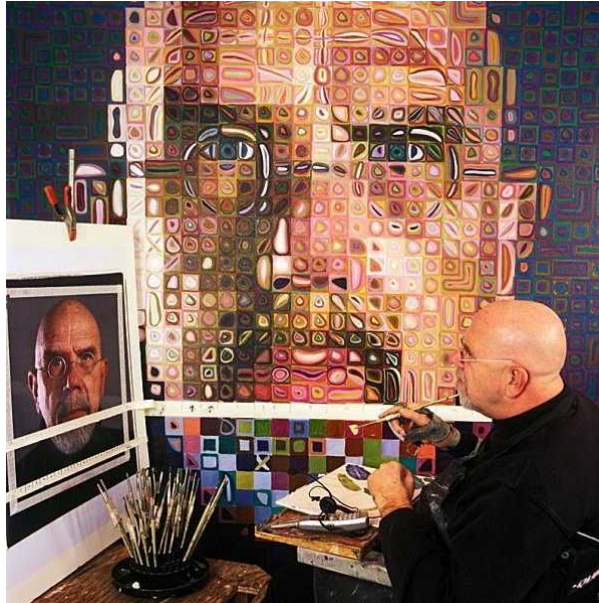
MH: I think of your pixelation as computer vision. As in, you're looking at these things through the eyes of a machine. Like your WalmArt series, I've always liked that about your pixels. Has anyone ever picked up on that or am I the only one? Machine vision is very fashionable right now. You should be selling these left, right and centre.



JL: Well I like that and there's clearly a surveillance camera aspect to that series but it's not deliberate. I do see the pixel as emblematic of our age however. I'm just amplifying my environment. And I have always been drawn to the rectilinear in the history of art as an aesthetic: Mondrian, Donald Judd, Albers. So the pixel is perfect for me.

MH: Gotcha. You ever done a self-portrait like that?

JL: No but I did one of my wife. Don't want to be too Chuck Closey.



MH: Did she like it?

JL: Sort of.

MH: That's a no then.

JL: Ha! It came out a bit too pink I think. Cats? Ok how about your new work? You made a big name for yourself over the past 5 years as the Google Earth guy but much of what I think you are about to show is not. Am I right? Do you notice a development?

MH: Maybe it's more of a regression than a development.

JL: Actually you have always had quite a mix going on. It's just the press who have labelled you.

MH: When I saw Oliver Griffin in Paris last month, he said you guys often see what I'm doing and ask "what the hell's he up to this time?" I liked that. I like eclecticism. I'm not only interested in looking at Earth from space, I'm also interested in language or self-published autobiographies and the lives no one wants to read about. The fact an explosion sounds different depending on the language you speak is interesting to me. And I think the anticipation of an explosion is the soundtrack of our age. So when I realized an explosion is written differently in different languages, I wanted to do something with that.

JL: Yes we should put that mock up of all of them in a row here.



I love them but had to push you to include them in the show. You thought they were too Pop? We should put an image of the Lichtenstein at the Tate here to compare:



MH: Not just Lichtenstein but Christian Marclay too:



MH: Of course, how can you make work like this when the field has been ploughed as much as it has? And anyway, is a series of pictures enough? I don't know if the translation element is enough to differentiate it from those guys.

JL: I think Marclay will be jealous. It will be that classic moment of seeing something somebody else did and thinking: arggh why didn't I think of that! He's going to be furious with himself!

MH: It's possible it's already been done and we won't know til someone points it out. But maybe it doesn't matter. I'm willing to let go of that, mainly because of your encouragement actually. I trust your judgement more than my own on this. I have a tendency to overthink things to the point of inaction. I need to chill out, get this stuff out into the world and see what happens. That's what I used to do.

JL: Yes it's a common byproduct of success, the second album syndrome that never ends actually, even when you are on your third and fourth album. You suddenly start considering and second guessing what others will think of you and your work.

MH: It has a lot to do with the faith other people have in you, or the investment they've put into you. But the instinct that started everything off was "fuck it." So it's important to return to that and not worry about things. What better way to do that than amongst friends! Also, I think interesting work happens when it's made with joy and fascination, and I've enjoyed making these a lot.

JL: Yes and in the company of like minded friends. When it's a dialogue as much as a monologue of brilliance.

MH: Absolutely. Art can be a lonely, solitary pursuit and the highs for me are always in the company of friends. Everything else is just work.

JL: Which is why our little network of you, me and Andreas chatting over WhatsApp has been so useful, to all of us I think.

MH: Yes, but I wonder sometimes if we should inject some new blood into the dialogue to prevent getting trapped in our own echo chamber. It's not only a problem of our group but elsewhere too.

JL: That's true. We can't just rely on that but it's a nice easy fall back, when others are not available.

MH: I often look at the thousands of messages we've exchanged and wonder if we should publish them some day. I guess there's some kind of shared language between us, we understand the references and the jokes, as well as the experience of raising kids and being in long-term relationships whilst still pursuing the pleasure and pain of making work and getting by, with all the highs and lows.

JL: We've tried expanding the WhatsApp group to include others but it doesn't seem to work so well. Is three a magic number?

MH: Maybe, but I think there's an ecstasy of communication between us that isn't always easy to find with others. Maybe we don't take each other very

seriously or we have faith in the criticisms we give each other. When I say we don't take each other very seriously, I actually mean that we take 'not taking each other very seriously' very seriously indeed. I think a lot of people struggle with that. Being honest isn't always easy and people rarely react favourably to criticism. We've known each other so long that we know each other's weaknesses and can mock them confidently.

JL: Yes it's a bit like asking your wife for her honest opinion, but we are generally more interested in each other's work than our wives are so its more constructive.

MH: And our partners probably underestimate how aware we are of our own predilections and weaknesses. I think that's in there somewhere too. Jesus, how did we end up here?

JL: Now I'm laughing because yes we are kind of pathetic but proud at the same time. Back to that word again. We should probably be more proud of ourselves that we actually are.

MH: Proud of what?

JL: Our achievements?

MH: David's next question is about reading and writing.

JL: You just deleted the cat question!

MH: I'm thinking none of the questions should be visible, they should only be alluded to. They started everything off but we can't see them, a bit like the big bang.

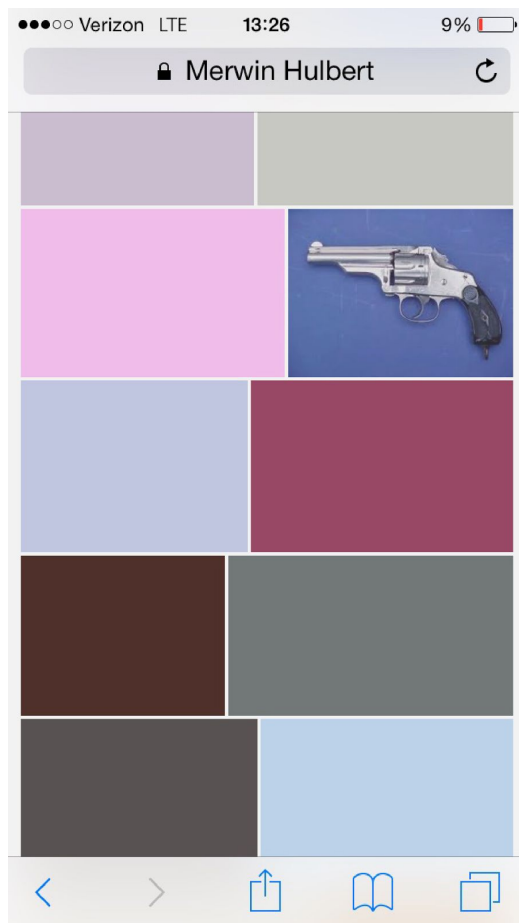
JL: I'm not sure if we are going to get to any of them anyway. Maybe this is enough. Is anyone going to read this far? It's already quite long.

MH: We should drop a reward in here, something that only someone who's read this far can claim. Maybe a voucher code for one of our books or something.

JL: No one is going to want that, mate. You are too proud.

MH: Hey, are we just showing four pieces in this show? My Life, eBay, Explosions and Luxury Cars? What about your Lewis Vuitton piece? You showing anything else?

JL: Yes I am still working on gold leafing that. Also Loading, of all the arms manufacturers. You?



MH: Oh, there's the Golden Ratio paintings and the Mishka Who? painting too.



JL: Did you try doing the Jonathan Who, Andreas Who versions?

MH: I've made lots of them but have yet to press the Publish button at the Lulu checkout. I have so many things piled up waiting to be made but I think it's best for some of them to remain in that 'almost' state forever.

JL:hello? Shall we wrap this up? It's starting to feel like a chore. We should also apologise to David for not answering his questions. We can still leave them in at the bottom though. They are interesting in their own right. I'm staring at a copy of Kenny's book right now. I ought to read it instead of WASTING TIME ON THE INTERNET, albeit with you.

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DE: Are we reading and writing more than we have in a generation?

DE: Has the Internet made us antisocial?

DE: Have we lost the ability to have a conversation?

DE: Has the Internet made us shallow?

DE: Is your life on Facebook any less 'real' than what happens in your day-to-day life?


DE: How is engaging with the Internet different from reading a book or watching TV?

DE: Do you ever take a digital detox?

DE: Is the web what a Stanford Professor calls 'stublime' - a combination of the stupid and the sublime?

DE: Could we argue that the various programmes of the 20th Century avant-gardes have only been realized in our 21st Century digital age? Are we all Cubists, Futurists, Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists now?

DE: Read any good Kenneth Goldsmith lately?



INTRODUCTION

Let's Get Lost

I'm wasting time on the Internet. I click to the *New York Times* front page to see the latest headlines and today a major nuclear deal with Iran was signed. The banner headline screams HISTORY and even though I haven't really been following the story, I click on it. I'm taken to a page with an embedded video that features Thomas Friedman asking Obama to explain what he thinks the United States gained from the nuclear deal with Iran. I check the time on the video—three and a half minutes—and figure that's not too long to listen to the president speak. He speaks; I watch. He continues to speak; I scroll through my Twitter feed but I still listen. I click back on the *Times* window and watch again. Somewhere about the three-minute mark, I start to think, Am I really wasting time on the Internet? This is important stuff that I've stumbled on to. I'm struggling to see what's so shameful about this. The video ends and, impressed by what the president was saying, I start to read Friedman's lengthy article about this beneath the video. I

