

INTERVIEW WITH PHIL AKASHI

You've named yourself an "Alchemist of language" and most of your work includes textual elements which connote a kind of cryptical messaging. What is your practice's relationship with language?

My art practice focuses on conceptual and cross-cultural experiments with language, materiality and aesthetics. It all started when I was living in China almost ten years ago. When I was observing at a master seal carver, at a traditional calligrapher or simply someone writing with Chinese characters, each stroke was like a piece of art in itself.

Using the aesthetics of Asian languages became a fascinating tool to express myself but also to change perception at how we look at language. Transforming something that could seem basic into something more precious, like an Alchemist would do, became an integral part of my art practice.

Since then, I have experimented and further deepened my interest in the aesthetics of other languages and my practice evolved and became more mature, more profound. Today, I feel I am more defined as an artist and I know better where I wish to go. I kind of found my path and I am dedicated to expanding the materiality and aesthetics of words and texts.

Your technique varies immensely, from abstract expressionism to street art. How you decide on the technique or material you are employing?

For me, it is important to create a sort of authentic and poetic language to express my ideas and emotions. The choice of technique or material comes to me instinctively during my experiments, travels and encounters.

By combining the use of traditional crafts with techniques of the abstract expressionism and street art movements, I am able to bridge tradition with modernity and to use materiality and aesthetics in my performative acts.

As a result, by looking at an artwork you can try to understand the fusion between my mind (spirituality and ideas) and body (repetitive and meditative gesture of strokes).



Phil Akashi/The Circle of Time, 2016

Either social, political or individual and intimate, what kind of tool is art for you? What's its purpose for you if we should admit that art has some purposes?

Art is for me a tool to express opinion, to stimulate curiosity, and to broaden our horizon. Art can also be a tool to simply bring positive emotion.

I personally enjoy exploring, challenge and engage questions relating to the notions of cultural identity, democracy, power, and resistance. I often include, into the materiality and aesthetics, narratives that are critics, sometimes anti-establishment, confrontational, and, at the same time, peaceful and meditative.

What do you think about today's art world? How does an ideal art world look like for you?

Today's art world is in constant evolution. Mobility, superficiality, growing domination of key players, online marketplaces, manipulation, new media, new fairs, new entrants are some elements that bring interesting opportunities but also major challenges.

As a nomadic artist active in the East/West dialogue, I am especially interested in looking at the art world from different angle or context. Western art has been considered the universal art world in the past, but I believe there is an interesting switch with new actors like for instance Chinese artists and collectors who are bringing fresh perspectives. These new influencers are finally starting to be treated as they deserve, and I appreciate that.

Regarding the ideal art world, I like the quote of social artist Martin Creed: “Art is shit. Art galleries are toilets. Curators are toilet attendants. Artists are bullshitters”. My ideal art world should be like this. Audacious and critics. It should shake our comfort zone and let artists pioneer the future.

You define yourself as nomadic artist. What are the limits and possibilities to be constantly mobile for an artist in contemporary era?

When artists move, the world moves too. I truly believe if you want to leave an impact on art history, you have to escape your comfort zone. It is the best way to change environment, to find constructive inspiration and to see the world differently.

Being constantly mobile brings also some administrative, fiscal, and other diverse challenges but I prefer to see the “nomadic glass” full of benefits.