

Interview conducted
in Cambridge, Massachusetts,
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Studio of Oliver Lutz, at MIT Visual Arts Program

Interview with Oliver Lutz

ROSS CISNEROS

RC: This is Ross I am here with Oliver Lutz and I am taking pause to listen to the various hums that are in the studio... mainly the source of my fascination is what he calls the deck.

The deck is where most of his artwork is stored... and the humidifier... because he is still of the flesh and I guess he has some inadequate mucus producing membranes.

Now that we've established a place—we're in the studio, the deck, there's a humidifier, there's a small dog and he is operating on a laptop. These are bolted to

the wall on swivel pallets... what I can only describe as some monitoring device—like suction pads on the palm of his hand—and some batteries establishing some sort of interface between hand and computer... So why don't you describe first of all what we see.

We see the deck.

Explain the deck.

What does the deck, how do you see the deck in your art practice?

Oliver: I would back up first to qualify the use of the term, the deck is a lingo derived from a consulting practice where in a collaborative sort of work, that requires a lot of thought that leads up to some eventual sort of communicative, sort of act, like a pitch, the deck is basically your document or platform for all the participants to put their pieces to and it's also where ideas become more clearly understood it's kind of like a sketchbook except that it's in PowerPoint and it can read linearly and actually it does as a presentation it's entirely a linear document and it's maybe authoritarian in that respect it's a presentation.

Ross: What interests me about that response is that it's as if the deck has these metaphysical tendencies to perform ideas, or lives for itself at a certain point. I've seen you working, and many of your sketches that come before the realization of a painting happen with the Wacom tablet and are then filtered through the deck.

Can I call it a deck in this context? In the context of painting?

Oliver: Yeah, loosely.

Ross: Let's talk about something else. When did you start drawing and realize that there were possibilities in drawing or making marks?

Oliver: Possibilities??

Ross: At some point in your life you could have thought, "wow there could be something more."

Oliver: That I can remember, I mean I have evidence that growing up I liked to draw but I can't say that I recollect or have evidence that I recognized that I was drawing.

Ross: Was there a moment you can recollect when you realized there was a possibility in thinking about drawing? You're saying that growing up, drawing was automatic.



Workstation

Oliver: Well, I see drawings I made as I was a kid and I know I didn't think it was important at the time, I just did it. I guess the first time I became conscious of drawing was maybe in third grade, making drawings of the Norse Myths. I remember it all starts with the abyss called Ginnungagapet. Which is where the earth was created, and there's an interesting story where you have this cow called Audhumla who fed milk to the first living creature which was a giant name Ymir who in turn gave life to a couple gods from his armpit sweat and trolls from the soles of his feet. The same cow presumably needed to eat so she licked a frozen piece of ice with her tongue to feed herself and eventually ends-up making the bodily form of the first god, named Buri, all from this block of ice. Buri ends up making a wife out of one of Ymir's daughters. They parent a generation of new gods who eventually kill the giant Ymir. From there, Ymir's various body parts and organs get distributed to create various parts of nature – his blood became the sea, his brains the clouds, his hair the trees... Growing up at that time around nine years old I started making a lot of these drawings. I remember doing one of the great hall called Valhalla where slain knights that would cut each other up on

a daily-basis and in the end of the battle stick their heads back on and then enjoy a big feast together inside the hall, which was made up of their shields. After the feast, they'd all take down their shields and start all over again, and just keep a cycle going. So, studying these things as a kid was great fun to illustrate so those are the first things I consciously remember actively taking an interest in the outcome of a drawing.

Ross: So you realized the potential with the creation myth. I want you to pinpoint a time that you were completely fascinated with the potential of technology as it relates to art practice.

Oliver: You're looking specifically for the first occurrence I can think of??

Ross: First occurrence!

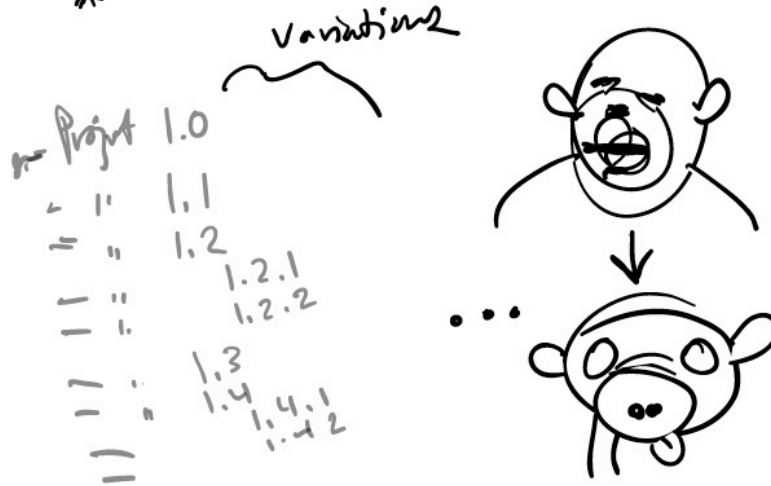
Oliver: I think it's a good question and I have many things in mind, but I don't know if it's the first so I continue to think about it. So as a kid growing up on a farm I was around tools so even something as simple as the handle on our well was something that was a real focal point on sort of our daily shores, or wrapping the pipes that went to our farm with electric wires so that they wouldn't freeze over the winter. That was actually interesting as a kid because it meant we could actually have water. But there wasn't an interest in the field of technology until recently until I was 21 or 22.

Ross: So when you were a kid on the farm, technology was a lifesaving because you had water and you had the ability to make work. So far everything seems pretty organic. Now I would like you to, in counterpoint, to describe a project or a fascination that is absolutely opposite that adolescent world of the well and the farm and the unconscious process of drawing, etc. where do you find yourself now and how much of that organic is still present in the work?

Oliver: I would say today I am very far from the organic. It's something that I am aware of in a project whether or not it's something that It's a really tough question. I guess I would say it depends on the type of work some do the work like some of the work that I do if it's drawing, even if it's on the computer, it can be putting a deck together as long as it's fluid and as long as the ideas have a certain... they're new to me and challenging to me, then I can say it's not that different in what I might identify as being an organic process but working with surveillance it something that is completely devoid of that and working with that sort of medium seems kind of a deliberate sort of defiant of myself, I love the organic, of the organic it's almost an intentional thing that I do things to see how far it

Work Platform

*chronicle progress of sketches/design...



Deck, sample no. 1

makes sense for me personally. Does that make sense to you that it comes down to mediums?

Ross: It seems, the way you put it to me, my immediate impression is that you are not someone who has the highest hopes that technology will not provide the public or your art practice with all the answers. You are still concerned with gesture even if it is through the Wacom tablet transmitting to the computer.

Oliver: Yeah, definitely that's a tension that has been growing in my work throughout the past two or three years and it's sort of a polarity that has been developing between projects, but I never thought of technology as providing us with the answers – it's just useful. Ten years ago when I stopped painting and got into film and information architecture, painting in contrast to what I was doing on the computer seems completely uninteresting, so doing this stuff on the computer was – like information architecture and systems – was really far more creative, I personally found, than working on a picture, it was far more conceptual, programmers are much more under rated in general – not that I was programming – but I was working a lot, so the visual conception that was necessary to do these projects was more than I had ever seen as an art. So as a medium it's

interesting, so turning that back into more of an artistically, more focused domain, it's technology is something to champion because it can help and be a lot of fun if you can use it in an organic way – and I don't even know if organic is the right word at that point – but if you can use it in a way that's natural to oneself and the forms you like to make...

Ross: Then it's worthwhile.

Oliver: Yeah.

Ross: I want to propose a fictitious prison hold. You are condemned, or simply required, to just do information architecture, how deeply would you grieve the painting practice??

Oliver: I think in that situation there would be absolutely no comparison between the two and without a second I would give up information architecture for painting if it came down to something like that.

Ross: You would choose painting practice over information architecture.

Oliver: Yeah, because what was appealing to me about information architecture, at the time that I did it, was the fact that it was, yes, the medium, but also a lot of stuff too like working with businesses, working with a lot of different people on a project, selling ideas to people.

Ross: Did you find yourself in a persuasive role? Was that part of the craft? Is that essentially what it is??

Oliver: As a strategist, yes, that's what I would do.

Ross: When you finish a painting do you see it as a persuasive agent??

Oliver: I would never think about it that way, maybe as a method or a technique, but I don't know what painting as a medium would persuade someone to realize... I can say someone can make use of a certain technique in a persuasive way.

Ross: I guess what I'm trying to say is that between selling your ideas in a "pitch" to a company and selling your ideas through an art image, there is to some degree a similar quality of control and persuasion.

So long as your paintings are considerate of your public. If your painting wasn't persuasive it would seem to me that it wouldn't be regarded...



Deck, sample no. 2

Oliver: Persuasive in communicating

Ross: Communicating content, communicating an idea. And I say that because in some of your past presentations, the way you diagram your record of how you got from point a to point b in some project, which falls in the realm of art, mirrors the kind of web that you spun in your days in information architecture, or maybe borrows that persuasive language. You have described your work in your art practices, the work that comes out of your studio, in a way that is not unlike the process that you used to persuade companies in information architecture and that I think is curious.

Oliver: Actually that's not entirely accurate, my use of a PowerPoint language has been in context of installations which I see as being a different sort of interest altogether for the paintings, for the most part I like the paintings to work all on their own and it's a different medium for working. I use a different studio for painting and it's a different approach I take for that work, it's two separate processes, and I can say that at this point I have almost a fraction practice where some of it is very like Indian, you know where crafting and painting is something that

as a process is a one way conversation and I do the work and then it needs to just stand on it's own, but with the installation ideas, there's immediately an interest in working with public spaces, or public entities or people in general, and at the point what is considered a social kind of realm, then this other language including the PowerPoint becomes something that is immediately useful to me. But there are two distinct area of work in my mind, and I thought of how I would join them, and I don't have any plans of joining them in a literal sort sense.

Ross: Do you think there's any hope for technology in art?

Oliver: Yes, without a doubt. If anything, what would be more questionable is whether there's hope for art in technology. It's a preoccupation and it's not going anywhere. Art that is about technology, that addresses technology, is past, expired, but technology itself does have a place in art and has everything to gain from art.

Ross: What saves the world, technology or art? Let me rephrase that, what saves the world technology or poetry?

Oliver: It's always one or the other.

Ross: Is beauty irrational?

Oliver: Yes.

Ross: Is there beauty in technology?

Oliver: Wow, that was a left hook. Technology can have form in the way people develop it and that can be beautiful for the people who can actually appreciate this form. Can you elaborate on the question?

Ross: Can beauty be found through technology in a procreative role?

Oliver: I see, though technology on it's own? I don't think so – only through the people that use it – that invest something in the work.

Ross: Bentley or Bufori will always say that their seats are handsome and maybe that's the example of having the human hand in there, somewhere.

Oliver: I think it's also, there's an authenticity thing there and I can't say if that's valid. I guess I can't say that all manufactured things are ugly. My point before is that what I think is beautiful about a manufactured item is the design. But for

some people and certain artists, like in Allan McCollum's work, processes or mass-production are appreciated and central.

Ross: Why do you make artwork?

Oliver: As a teenager it was my dream to be a minister of propaganda, even through college. And now I don't know, I don't feel the same way; I think I would have been better off going into public relations if that was something I wanted to do. Occasionally on a seasonal basis I take an interest in thinking how I can contribute to social good and that became more important post 9/11. But I've also begun to question the political role that artists' have been claiming recently because it seems especially easy for artists today to take on social justice – like the interventionists or other artists like Rebecca Gomberts or anybody who's working with a political agenda in a social cause. I find politically direct art often oversimplifies life and also falls short of the potential that the imagination can play in art. And so my tendency now is to take an interest in work that is more personal.

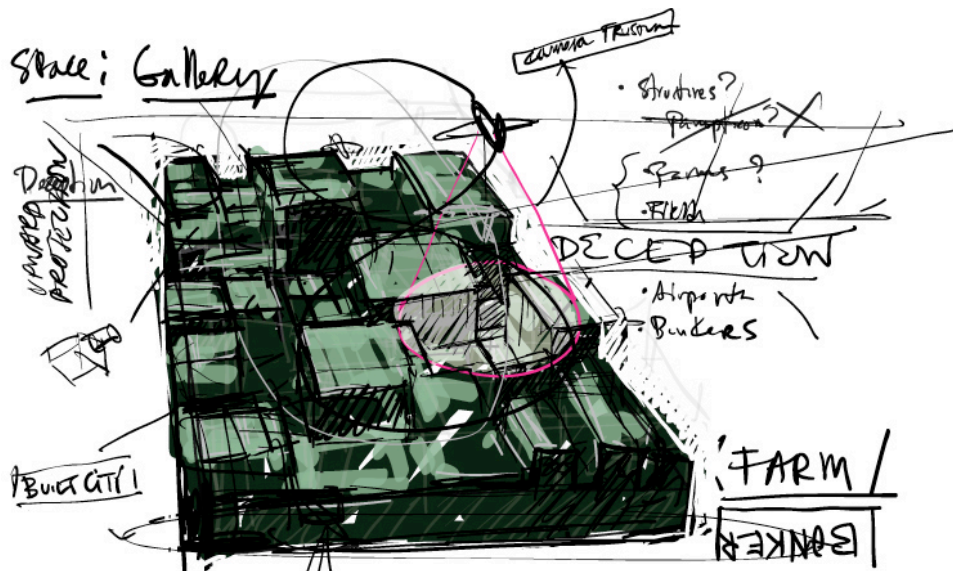
Ross: So all of this interventionism is due to some sort of political anxiety, a taste of the apocalypse, especially in New York, all that aside where would you want to be and what would you want to be doing if you knew the world is going to end? You have a single day left.

Oliver: I guess I would probably want to see my brother my twin and spend the day with his family. He lives in Montana right now and does avalanche forecasting. He has two daughters, his wife, he just bought a house.

Ross: You're in Montana, your brother is picking you up, you're in the car...

Oliver: We would get coffee. Or maybe we'd pick up some honey-roasted peanuts get two bottles of Moxie, which is this great soda which started in 1884 as sort of a stomach sedative. The bottle's got this orange cover on it with the face of a white man that looks like Bob Dobbs without a pipe, from the Church of the Sub-genius...

END!!



- What differentiates this from a train set?
- Concealment
- Deception

Deck, sample no. 3