

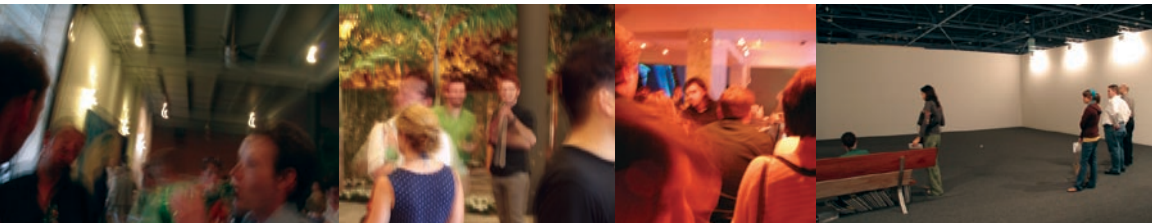
**Dear Mom,**

Derek Coté

## **Painting, painting, painting, drawing, painting, painting, resin-dipped, jewel-emblazoned skull....**

When I attended art school no one ever suggested trading in my cordless drill and flush-cut saw for a pencil and brush. Perhaps if I did I would be able to sell something. Maybe even at an art fair! However, since I am a sculptor, I could always spring for anatomical lessons, a Bedazzler (as seen on TV), a quart of resin, and become a charter member of the resin-dipped/jewel-emblazoned/skull sculpture club. Perhaps I should just start using mirrors in my work, or subscribe to the “crappy-good” craft aesthetic. Don’t think I have become bitter, I am merely saying what many are thinking. I guess I have always reserved the hope that we, as artists, would seek to challenge the status quo and react in an exchange of ideas about what it is we do and why. It’s called a dialogue! But maybe that is asking too much from a bustling market captivated by entertainment value and commercial flair, whose intoxicating aroma has the ability to lead many away from passion, and towards fame. The subtle re-branding of a once cerebral, and theoretical endeavor into one that more closely resembles a “system,” where resin is sold as “Resin!” and a Photoshopped image is promoted as a mysterious set of intuitive processes only the artist could conceive of, is utterly brilliant. Once again, art has been mystified.

But I don’t blame the artist for this, nor the artist’s dealer. After all, we all want to make a living doing what we love. I would, however, like to draw attention to the art buyer. I use the term “buyer” here to differentiate buying from collecting, a difference that may be more easily illustrated with the introduction of a shopping

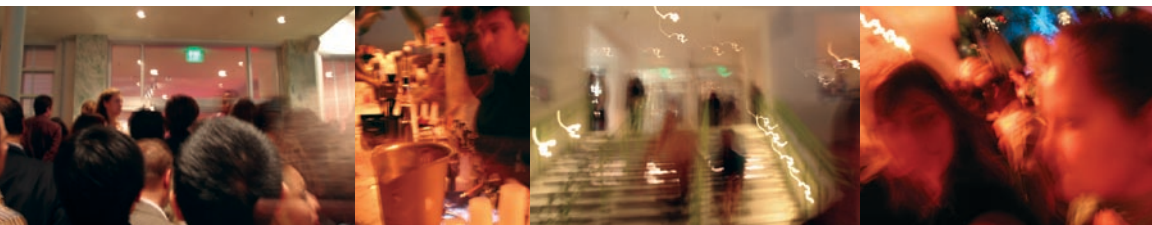


cart. Artists have a responsibility to their audience and themselves to create a discourse, via their work, that confronts and examines the arena in which they practice — this constant re-calibration should encourage an environment that is relentlessly demanding yet rewarding. On the same token, art buyers should also have an equal responsibility to be informed about their role in the game. Rather than encourage incessantly blind production in pursuit of a buck, buyers should be expected to practice a certain amount of diligence. There are even organizations catering to the 21-39 set with the purpose of informing

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them of collecting practices and local events that they should, and can attend in order to become an enlightened patron of the arts, though their benefit and effectiveness is a topic for another discussion. Rather, the prerequisite for inclusion and participation is a fat wallet and a quick hand.

While an acquisition by a conversant and savvy collector can create a sea change in one's career, being snatched up by any other of the thousands of random buyers only creates a small, and often forgettable, ripple measured in dollars. Sure it's great to be able to pay the rent, however, the long-term benefit is missed entirely. Alas, without collectors, or buyers, we artists merely exist as a band of skilled laborers, and dealers, mere groupies. Some argue that this Bull of an art market is good for the economy of art, providing more people with a piece of the pie. The problem with an oversized pie is an inferior quality reminiscent of a bakery outlet trinket — filling, but not very tasty.



The dynamics between opening day at a Barney's Warehouse Sale and opening day at Art Basel Miami Beach are, dynamically speaking, very similar. I am not even talking about curbside manner here, that is reserved for the book I am writing about etiquette. What is worth mentioning, however, is the virtual stampede to get the "hot new thing" regardless of who, or what for that matter, created it. As a member of the press, I was able to witness feeding time from inside the tank. On the other side of the thin glass barrier awaited a sea of Chanel and Dolce-clad fish not quite fortunate, or important enough, to be in on the collector/press preview where shrimp scampi, scallops, chicken satay, and of course, mimosas, and chilled Chardonnay was served by a small army of caterers. I wondered if their prize would still be available by the time they scampered to the booth of their choice. If not, there is an increasing amount of other alternative fairs one could shift their focus to where five works can be purchased for the price of one at Art Basel. I write this letter as I am preparing to fly to Basel, Switzerland, to see the original Basel Art Fair, and first ever Scope Basel Art Fair, where the two will go mano-a-mano, with little other distraction or competition. It will be interesting to see which other fairs make the swim next summer.

So, what exactly is the cause of this frenzy? Here is how I break it down: A magnificent amount of disposable cash being spent on a magnificent amount of disposable art = more sales = more galleries = more opportunities for artists to sell stuff = more artists making more stuff that sells = reduction in authenticity = a reduction in a critical dialogue = reduction in quality of stuff being shown = watered down market. Certainly, purchasing one crumpled-up pack of Camels for \$160,000.00 makes perfect sense, but two? Perhaps all this is a good thing. If Donald Kuspit is right, Postart is real, the end of art is near, and the defecation has already hit the ventilation.

