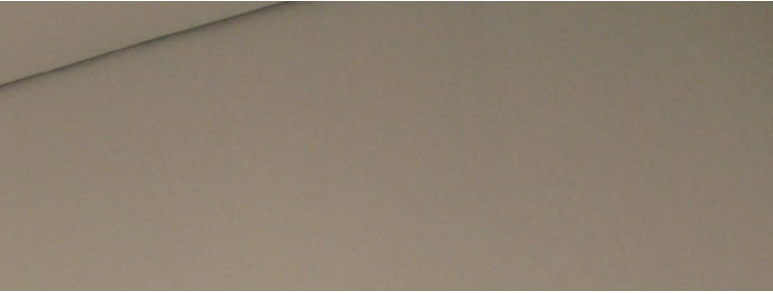


Dear Mom,

Derek Côté

In my many years of “arting,” I have come to understand a couple things about how a very convoluted art world functions within its divisions and hierarchies. The downside is that it has taken me sixteen years to figure some of this out, the upside is that most of this information would have done me very little good when I was a “young” artist. Which brings me to something I have learned recently. In order to be considered a young artist, one must be under the age of 35. This is according to Miami University’s Young Sculptors (or painter’s) Competition held every year, which is juried by an outside party responsible for dishing out a \$10,000 purchase award, and including the winner in Miami University’s Best Young Sculptors of the Twenty-First Century Collection...Whew!

This presents a situation. Since I am already 35, I have to figure out a way to maintain the desirability and opportunity youth offers an artist. I’ve been to Vegas a couple of times, and I know that in order to double your odds you have to play more than one hand. So one option is to create for myself a doppelganger. Ideally my twin would share all of my good qualities and possess those that I lack. She would have her own body of work, her own set of ideals, goals, and ultimately her own career, a career that I would benefit from. That’s right, she. The male dominated artworld is a thing of the past and we all know that sex sells, especially in the artworld. In creating my twin I would adopt the method conceived by Komar and Melamid to come up with America’s most wanted artist, a conglomeration of everything the art world wants in a hot, young artist, and then some. I would be the so called Wizard of Art, scheming from an undisclosed location, controlling the career of my mysterious, rarely seen, artistic genius, whose shyness to appear in public would only add to her surely enigmatic reputation.



I am not going to turn this letter into a rant and make statements as to how the art world's soul is adjusting towards an MTV culture where the new has a shelf life of about twenty months, and its longevity is based on gold and platinum sales. The fact is that we, as a culture, do have an appetite, and perhaps even an obsession with celebrity, and the preservation of youth. So much so that we are willing to inject and disfigure ourselves to retain that which is perceived as desirable. If you know of a contemporary artist having Botox injections and/or cosmetic surgery please send me a note, I'm curious.

This obsession with youth is promoting a pseudo-instinctive, obsession with landing that big important show before age twenty five, in hopes of securing a lucrative, twenty-month art career. The question is, according to Jerry Saltz, renowned critic of *The Village Voice*, "Do you want to have a twenty-month career, or a twenty-year career?" In other words, what price are you willing to pay in order to "make it big?" Are you willing to compromise your studio practice or even your creative process in favor of commercial recognition? Is it worth risking the twenty-year career? I find myself hoping the market tanks soon and weeds out some of the schlep. How many times have you committed to an afternoon of gallery hopping only to find a good lot of galleries showing iterations of the same type of work by a handful of artists who are either still in graduate school or have just escaped and living off their trust? (Though I do know some artists who are genuinely surviving, I know a great deal more who have nothing better to do). That is not to say that graduate school does not provide opportunity for artists to focus on the development of their work while avoiding work for a couple more years. It only means that "dialog" is often being fueled by work that is frequently naïve and under developed at best. At worst it is completely devoid of meaning and is testament to the market's control of content. Despite his blasé attitude, the hare has to keep running at full speed in order to overcome the tortoise. I am reminded of what Edward Winkleman once wrote, it goes something like "...artists should just make what they feel compelled to make regardless of current trends. As trends and tastes change, so does the market, and when it shifts towards you, you will be the real deal." And that should only last for about twenty months.