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## 26 Questions for Emerging Photo Art Star David Benjamin Sherry



Michele Abeles

Artist David Benjamin Sherry

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by Chloe Wyma

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**Name:** David Benjamin Sherry

**Age:** 31

**Occupation:** Artist

**City/Neighborhood:** Red Hook, Brooklyn

**What project are you working on now?**

I'm about to start making new work as my show at Salon 94 came down last week. I will be working in my studio these coming months as opposed to hitting the road and making work out west.

**Your second monograph, “Quantum Light,” was just released in conjunction with a solo show at Salon 94. Where does the title come from, and how might it describe your photography?**

I usually put words together late at night, flipping through books, listening to music, letting my mind wander. This title I thought of while I was watching “2001: A Space Odyssey.” “Quantum” refers to a “specific amount of light” — which is basically what a photograph records. And I just liked the way it sounded.

**Your most recent work features psychedelic abstractions of American deserts and parks — one photograph, for example, presents a geyser in bubblegum pink. What was the most interesting place you visited for this project?**

Utah was where I found the most striking biodiversity. I was interested in the topographic details of the desert. Specifically, the skin of rocks and cliffs, canyons and slot canyons. I really love Escalante National Monument in Utah.

**Have you gotten any flack from nature purists who don't like seeing America's natural parks rendered in lavender and acid green? What interests you about making nature surreal?**

Yes, I get hate mail from Nature purists every day! Ha no — I think anyone who finds pleasure in the natural world would enjoy seeing these ancient rocks and mountains in surreal colors. I would assume that they would be thrilled that I was inspired by nature; I wouldn't expect judgment from a nature purist.

**In the introduction to the monograph, photographer Collier Schorr talked about your work in terms of the “homosexual gaze.” Does queerness play a big part in your work? If so, how?**

Queerness, being queer, the existence of queer is a big part of my identity, so of course it finds its way into my work. The fact that it exists is probably the reason that I am able to be an artist. I can't really detail specifically how it plays a part in my work, kind of the same I can't really tell you why I breathe — but I can say that so much of my inspiration comes from queer culture.

**You achieve all your color effects through darkroom techniques. You said that you “would like to remain a purist with photography and push color with the alchemy of the darkroom.” How has digital photography changed the way we look at images? What, in your opinion, is the future of analog photography?**

I think this is a question that comes up a lot — in the same vein that people talk about the “end of print,” whether there will even be libraries in the future, etc. Of course technology will alter the way we access and acquire information and images; but whether or not that will change — in a deeper sense — how I live in the world or see the world, I can't say. Probably not.

**What's the last show that you saw?**

“Richard Avedon — Murals and Portraits” at the Gagosian Gallery.

**What's the last show that surprised you? Why?**

Probably the Paul Thek retrospective at the Whitney called “Diver.” It really left such a deep impression. I was surprised because I didn't anticipate being overwhelmed on such a raw, emotional level. I walked through the exhibition in tears and I have to say it was the first time that seeing another person's art made me cry.

**What's your favorite place to see art?**

I really enjoy the Met; it's my favorite in New York. I get this whimsical feeling when I'm there — like I'm wandering through a fairy tale of human experience. There's the sense of wonder and purpose you get when you see how this thing we call art has connected us as humans since we began creating it.

**What's the most indispensable item in your studio?**

It's a tie between tequila and body paint.

**Where are you finding ideas for your work these days?**

I'm not at liberty to discuss the specifics, but in general, I'd say culture at large.

**Do you collect anything?**

Artwork from friends at the moment, but also vintage Patagonia, strange caps and hats, plants, books, rocks, wood, textiles. Lots of stuff I guess.

**What's the last artwork you purchased?**

Two still prints by Kenneth Anger. (They were the first artworks I ever purchased too!)

**What's the first artwork you ever sold?**

A somewhat haunted and magical portrait of me and my closest friend Terry Powers from college (which was also the first picture of mine that was ever published).

**What's the weirdest thing you ever saw happen in a museum or gallery?**

When I was at the Paul Thek show at the Whitney a docent or guard working in the exhibition hesitantly approached me just as I was leaving and in a hushed, kind of disgusted voice he told me that he thought Paul Thek might have had AIDS and died from it. He started telling every passing viewer the same thing as they walked by. I was already in tears and just stared at this older man in a uniform who interrupted my experience... Something was so off about his comment and it was such inappropriate timing. The whole room just stood still; it was like Thek's ghost was there.

**What's your art-world pet peeve?**

I think the Bruce High Quality Foundation says it best, "What happens in the art-world stays in the art world."

**What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant?**

I've spent equal time at Lovely Day in the city as well a certain Karaoke bar off of Canal Street. I never remember the name of it or where it is or how we end up there, but it's always wild fun.

**Do you have a museum- or gallery-going routine?**

Right now I'm making a habit of seeing things regularly — Thursdays each week for museums and shows during the summer. But in the past I would kind of see things in waves of varying intensity, kind of sporadically.

**Know any good jokes?**

Yes: Why couldn't the Buddhist vacuum in the corner? Answer: He didn't have any attachments.

**What's the last great book you read?**

“What Color Is The Sacred” by Michael Taussig.

**What work of art do you wish you owned?**

Well, I know you can't own performances necessarily — but I wish that I could somehow live with Leigh Bowery's performance at Doffay Gallery in 1988. It sounds selfish, but I'd love to peer behind a piece of glass and see him daily sitting and performing for himself on my sofa.

**What would you do to get it?**

Oh, you know, the typical sacrifices people make: sell your soul or your give up your first-born.

**What international art destination do you most want to visit?**

Rome.

**What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?**

Reka Resinger. We studied together at Yale and she currently is living in a small village called Bag in Hungary (her homeland). She's working with the elderly community there, learning about her culture's past and making films and photographs of these dying Hungarian folk traditions. I've visited her there and it's really incredible what she's doing. I'm going to visit her again later this summer.

**Who's your favorite living artist?**

That's a tough one as they're so many to name, but Robert Irwin and Genesis Breyer P-Orridge are two of my favorite living artists. I think they represent really different ideals and I often need the whole spectrum of everything to understand myself and see the world.

**What are your hobbies?**

My cats, my garden, record shopping, and cooking.

*To see works by David Benjamin Sherry, [click the slide show](#).*

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