



Subject A in amusement park, 2015, photograph

Little figurine of girl playing lute seated on top of hair noodles.

IS: When I first saw this work I thought of the Victorian era mourning paraphernalia, specifically, hair of the deceased formed into a framed piece or jewelry, little landscapes or portraits made of human hair. It was the whole industry. And when you look at the statuette, you think, what kind of song would she sing? Is it gonna be a jolly song? No, obviously, it has to be something sad, like a funeral lament and this enforces this notion of death and loss into the piece. When I looked at the noodles, I only noticed it's the noodles later, but my first thought was it's some kind of a wig, or actual hair arranged in this specific manner. And the figurine has those long sculpted hair and she's holding a string instrument. You see the strings, the multiplicity of parallel lines, hinting to the notion of hair again. In a sense it looks as if you've made a striped painting, without making a striped painting.

A: The figure came from the junk store in Starr Street off Jefferson stop. Its facial

expression was something that I would never be able to capture in painting or drawing. My friend R. found it first and he used it for sculpture he's just arranged in the store. We would go there and start arranging all the junk, taking pictures of it and trying to work out sculptures right there. He didn't want to use the figure for anything though, so I pretty much stole it from him. The noodles came from me working formally with it, trying to find texture, color and base that would match.

IS: What's the girl singing?

A: It would be something slow and broken, soft and barely hearable, like a whisper.

Little boot with eye peeking thru sole. Piece of white hair comes from it's mouth.

IS: White hair connects it to the previous piece, it's the same motif. All the parts, the boot, the eye and the hair are very intimate body-related signifiers bringing you to the idea of human remains and essence. The basic elements you would reduce the body to. The focus on eyes, hair and feet is also sexual and reproduction-related, which brings us to the idea of baby as well. Funny thing it is reproduction not as a promise, but as a failure. The time is not moving forward in this piece, it goes backwards. It's the idea of reconstruction and aftermath. Also the position of the eye gives you this uncanny feeling of your eye touching the ground, being sandpapered. The fact that it's a baby boot makes it even more disturbing and it's the introduction of this baby idea, which is apparent in your other pieces. Blond hair also invokes the narrative of the light baby hair that turn darker with age.

A: I like the shoe as something that references the body from the ground up, it's where person starts. Reducing that to the baby makes it almost more comical, than if it was a full-size human. It also replaces the notions of irony, self-knowledge and maturity with an idea of innocence. The boot came from another junk store where they have tons of baby shoes. I was doing some shopping online and the blonde wig is from Amazon. Blonde hair is very cinematic and more rare from the evolutionary standpoint.

IS: Why are the laces on the boot untied?

A: It relates to being undone, less agile.

IS: So if you imagine the piece as a character, he's gonna be powerless in the face of the grater force, less defined and in the making and it takes us back to the idea of baby.

A: The shoe is extremely abject and is almost garbage, while the eye brings back some power and knowledge and it animates the object.

IS: Yes, we've been talking about the similar thing with Ben Kellogg in the context of his usage of those cartoony eyes in his practice. Like how you can change the eye expression of the subject to conjure different meanings, using eyes to give the piece personality, character and charm. You naturally associate eye with mind, perception and identity.

Where did you get your eye?

A: It's from the store called "The Complete Sculptor", it's the best store.

IS: What came the first? The eye or the hair?

A: The eye.

IS: And you used the blue eye?

A: Yes, for pretty much the same reason - rarity, readability.

IS: Yes, it's the same as with hair. Lots of babies are born with blue eyes that darken later. It's an awareness, but it's a primal awareness not being tainted with any preconceptions.

Concrete slab with baby footprints. Crushed bug is encased in the right footprint.

IS: What I thought of when I saw it can be boiled down to two words — unpunishable carelessness. A little kid taking a bug apart out of curiosity, not taking into the account the pain of the process. Kids and bugs. What kind of bug did you use?

A: It's like a chrome-colored green beetle. I got it off Etsy. There's this woman who only sells bugs in packs of 4. She lives in Idaho. I chose it for its color and exoticness, the emerald green looks very precious. To me its future and past, cause bugs have been around for so long. Beetles have been sacred for so long. It also looks futuristic. When people create visions of the future, they use ideas that relate to insects. Like exoskeletons in movies.

IS: Yeah, I guess insects are mysterious, cause you cannot imagine being an insect. This is untapped territory. You see this thing functioning, but you cannot socialize or get in touch with it. It reminded me of this old story. You're in the room with the mosquito, how would you communicate with the mosquito?

A: Speak with it?

IS: No, kill it. The same way God would communicate with a human. Also about the jewel

aspect of it — if you noticed, the bug is positioned in the same place as the eye on your other piece. Jewel also rhymes with an idea of an eye. Gems have been used as eyes in some of Greek statues. Anyway, how would you imagine a kid who's left those footprints? What age? How would he be dressed?

A: I can see a 3 second glimpse of this movement, this action. He's wearing boots...

IS: Yes, a very short movement of kid whose face you never see. You would always be behind the kid. Like this scene from Inception, when the main character looks at his children from the back, but they never show their faces. It's also an archetypical image of kids always being in front of you, a generational metaphor. You cannot imagine what they see and what they are. You always gonna be behind them.

Red wine bottle in wooden case. Pulse reader attached to the bottle.

IS: Probably it's the only work that steps out of the general sensibility you're exploring. It's not about childhood, footwear or hair. It made me think of about an old rich guy having a stroke after another glass of Primitivo. However, one thing that connected it to the rest of your works was the idea of vanity, powerlessness, of a futile attempt to revive something unrevivable, to measure the pulse of non-living entity. Also connotations of Christianity came in, like red wine and transformation. And one object is the symbol of festivity, happiness, leisure and absence of awareness, while the other stands for the opposite — research and measurement, disease and sadness.

A: It started from the image of a piece by Rebecca Horn. She made those big wine bottles with custom labels wrapped in copper wire. The wire on the bottle made me wanna turn it into something medical. The bottle itself is some sort of body, like blood or whatever.

IS: That's what I've been talking about when I mentioned Christianity and ideas of transmutation. It's red wine and God's will creates something out of nothing, wine out of water. Creating a system on blank, neutral canvas.

A: It looks like the bottle is of the blood, of the human.

IS: Yeah, and in this work you do the same things to wine as you would do to a human, but essentially it's pointless, it's a failure and it creates this weird sadness.

A: I also wanted humor to be inserted somewhere.

IS: Obviously it's funny. Imagine a cartoon of a huge ass bottle of wine dying of heart attack on hospital bed. We're losing him! Give me some morphine!

A: Also the wine box is the coffin.

IS: Exactly! And it's the notion of futility as well. The body is in the coffin already, but you're still trying to save it.

A: Yeah, but looks like it should be resuscitated and there's some sort of a goal. It has a purpose, but there is nothing there.

IS: In the piece the wine bottle is not full though, it's half gone. Did you want to make it look more generic, to eliminate the assumption of specific brand? Would you use a new bottle for this piece?

A: Actually, I would. I wanted originally to make my own label and put some sort of text or image on it.

IS: I think it makes more sense when it's generic, cause it reinforces this connection between wine and human body. Also the fact that it's half-done makes it look like *not* a promise of a future, it's the aftermath. This what makes it sad, it's the wasted body. You cannot do anything with it, but you're still trying to do something, with your knowledge, your devices, with your skills. There's glass, there's this border between your instruments and what you're trying to measure.

Wooden box topped with figurine of baby sleeping on boulder.

IS: The box is essentially a cradle. What would hold a sleeping baby? Obviously a cradle. There is a simple folk concept of sequencing human life. You go from baby to adult to old person, and the first and the last stage are oftentimes being mixed up. Baby is not yet fully a human, old man is already almost not one. When you're an old man you turn into a baby again. Babies and old people require special treatment. They get along as well, there's a trope of grandpa hanging out with his grandson. The next part of the belief is that if you're not human, you're not alive in a sense. An old man is a dead man, he's not here. Partly he's still in this world and partly he already belongs to the world of the dead. Same goes with baby - it's not yet entirely here, and that's why babies and old people can communicate so well. If you look at the way traditional cradles and coffins are designed and decorated, you'll find striking similarities, nevermind the specific culture. These are devices to separate the non-fully-living being from the human world. If you take oral tradition, songs that are usually performed at crucial moments, such as death, marriage, birth of a child, basic things that relate to food and reproduction, agricultural cycle and times of the year, you'd find that lullabies and laments bear the same formal qualities. Apparently, there is a strong connection between the ideas of birth and death. And this piece perfectly

renders this notion. The fun fact is that the box looks like some kind of device and, as I mentioned it already, coffins and cradles are essentially devices of separation humans created to put these little walls between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Like we have our domain, they have theirs.

A: This one was made at the same time as the girl playing the lute. It's from the same junk store as well. The base is the wooden knife block, it's just turned on its side. It doesn't read that way at all though.

IS: Oh My God. This is really good. You took out the knives, but in a sense there's still a thought of sleeping on razors. Like in Nightmare On Elm Street, where you have the same notions of dreaming and danger. There's a scene in which one of the characters is in coma, in the endless sleep. In the world of the living he's on the hospital bed, in Freddy's world he's tied to the bed frame and there's flaming inferno with spikes and knives underneath.

A: I'm taking out the knives, the danger is there, but it's inexplicit. You can intuit it though. The other thing is that the baby is actually sleeping on this rock. That's the way it came, it was on a rock. To me it also started this narrative. Why would someone leave baby sleeping on this big boulder?

IS: It accentuates this idea of uncomfortable dangerous sleep. It's just one tiny step from sleeping on rock to sleeping on razors. On the other hand the rock works as a buffer. It's protecting the baby, while paradoxically reinforcing the same feeling of discomfort and danger.

A: It's soft looking, but it's hard to the touch. It is also an object coming from another use. What's the story from the object's previous life? Is it decorative? It looks like it was made to be abandoned.

IS: The pyjamas baby's wearing also has those peculiar bumps, pimples, little spikes, and it balances it all out. You have the knife box, the rock, but the baby is spiked as well as if in retaliation. It's his protective armor. This creates a set of meaning that make the piece so strong.

A: It was one of the things I took a picture of in the junk store and then I left, but I had to come back for it. The guy who runs the store is this hasidic guy and everyone just calls him "The Father". They say "ask the father", and he always just makes up the price for things on the spot.

IS: I should just call him נבאַן and squeeze out a huge discount then.

A: I got the knife base from there as well, they had a bunch of them, but this one was the most nondescript, the most blank.

General discussion.

IS: Looking at your work, there's a bunch of recurring motifs that go thru your practice and represented by different mediums. The first one I want to start with is the boot motif. You have the boot with an eye, the footprints, those little Burberry boots. Also one of your earlier works is the sneaker. Can you talk about it, please?

A: The first one came out of frustration with all my sculptures. I needed to make something for a show that was coming up really soon and I had nothing, and everything kept being rejected. I was desperately searching for something that would be impactful and have some sort of emotional intensity. I just cut this hole out and I pushed the eye thru in it and it came together in that moment and I think that one just spurred the rest of that series, even though it wasn't intended in any way, because I don't have any autobiographical connection to it. It was a spontaneous gesture.

IS: It is your overall method. Did you have any similar insights, when you were doing something real fast without understanding what it is even? And then seeing it has some power and importance?

A: My first major project was the documentary, that was before I knew anything about using a camera, using sound or whatever. I had no idea.

IS: Yeah, you did the documentary about this guy in [city name]. He was a [job title] and also a [member of a subculture].

A: Thinking about everything we've talked about just now and thinking about that project, a lot of the same tropes are in there from the very beginning. His potential, his dreams, his futility and actions...

IS: Which specific aspects of your interaction with him fueled your practice in terms of those specific works, we've just discussed?

A: Ideas of powerlessness. I thought about him as of someone who should be in power, in charge as his profession. And identify as a powerful person in that role, but his physical body and the world of his mind battled that or totally contrasted that powerful role.

IS: Yeah, it was funny to see him doing martial arts and talking about his body being a killing machine, but at the same time he can't nuke his dinner without triggering a smoke alarm. There's a discrepancy between how a person describes himself and what a person is.

A: I wanted to explore more of his fantasy world, just push the idea of who you are further with him.

IS: Yeah, and in the end he freaked out. He thought it goes too deep.

A: I also wanted to capture my immaturity in that movie.

IS: Yeah, there's a scene with two of you in the house, where he pretends he's arresting you, executes the power scenario, cause you're on his territory, you're in his house, but it's also undermined by his actual position - he's not in his professional role at this point. This scene is a good description of this conflict I can see in most of your works. This "attempt still". It's futile, but it's an attempt. An attempt and a failure.

A: It was all intuitive, we never planned far in advance what we were shooting.

IS: What about the scene on the beach, when he's reading a poem? It's very strong.

A: I gave him the tape recorder to record his poetry. I wanted to push it really far with this intimacy into the realm of what you do when you're alone.

IS: His poetry is actually good. Like when he talks about his "walk" and how it "just ended in 15 minutes". It made me think of Robert Walser. After a nervous breakdown he started taking those long extensive walks as a substitute for his writing. The rhythm of walking and the rhythm of writing. In his world his walking *was* his writing, it was his medium, but the tragedy is that no one was able to read it. It's not entirely sad though, cause it still was his practice, it's just it was only him who was able to decode his own system. Actually the only other reader of him walking in Swiss mountains was the overseeing eye of God. Anyway, another thing I wanna talk about is the comedy element of your practice, that you mentioned. How does it add up to your practice and in regard to which specific pieces it's most apparent?

A: The ones that have those two elements combined. The baby and the porcelain noodle girl.

IS: Yeah, those are really powerful.

A: I feel the humor comes from really static facial expressions. I just imagine myself as them. I see myself making those faces, being in that gesture. Being in this position for me is really humorous.

IS: Yeah, like sleeping on a knife holder or playing the lute on the pile of noodles. In a sense it is funny, but what's behind this mechanism? What makes it funny? Your awareness?

A: More like the object's power to take you over. You're looking at it and it's messing with you.

IS: Yeah, the only way to perceive those pieces as funny is if you try to *be* them, try to erase the distance between the object and the beholder. From the external perspective it's very sad and disturbing, all those notions of powerlessness, birth and death and the cycle, but when you put yourself into such description of life you start laughing. And this is what you do in life in general. The best aspect of it is that it goes in line of the general way of how you would understand the classic figurative sculpture. Actually it's the common teaching method - you look at the statue and you try to imitate the posture with your body. It's amazing how this very classical way of perception is also applicable to your works, but on a more conceptual level and from that clever narrow angle of humor. So

A: I like to think you don't need to know anything about art to make art.

IS: Yeah, and this is your method of pure intuition. You figure out this very old technique of understanding the classic Greek and Roman sculpture with thrift store items. It's like how you describe a very complex notion with simple instruments. Tools always suck, you know. There's always gonna be a better tool for whatever you're doing at the moment, the acceptance of imperfection.

A: When I think of those pieces in the context of an opening or some crazy art show, like the last one they were in, I feel like I want them to relate to the space.

IS: Yeah, it was a dance studio with mirrors everywhere, which also suggested the ideas of body, movement, reflection and imitation.

A: I try to make them as fast they go into my mind.

IS: Have you ever had a moment, when you've been working on a piece in such way and it made you understand something fundamental, which would be applicable not only in this specific situation, but would be relevant in a bigger picture? Some idea you would wanna push further?

A: It's really still developing, it's making itself clearer to me as the time goes by, but actually I try hard not to give myself the larger picture of my work.

IS: You feel like if you gonna understand it, it's gonna impede with your practice? You gonna look at the last page of the book and it wouldn't be interesting for you to read it anymore?

A: Exactly. I don't remember trying to think of what's gonna connect the works or what I wanna achieve with them. It has to come from the more idiotic place, the retardness, you know.

IS: Yeah, the archetype of a fool. Sometimes it's better not to know to achieve something. It's what creates the drama, makes it entertaining. But what about the fundamental things,

like the baby motif which is so apparent? We were trying to find archetypes in your practice, cause it's asking for it. It's all those very basic things, how you live and you die.

A: How you live and how you die... It's so insanely broad. I really like that those works have that read, but for me it's not something I'm really aware of.

IS: Yes, but it's just one of the narratives. Can you think of some different narrative? How would *you* interpret them? Obviously it is hard to analyze the system you're the part of; outer perspective always helps. I just gave you the outer perspective, what about the inner perspective? It may not even have anything to do with the viewpoints we've already outlined.

A: I think of them more as like toys. I really like to think I'm the toymaker, but a really bad one, really boring toymaker, whose dolls aren't fun to play with.