

A Moment with Hugh Scott-Douglas

INTERVIEW *John Roberts*

Before heading to Los Angeles, Canadian artist Hugh Scott-Douglas wrote to us from a bus in Michigan about how transience and environment have played a role in his work, his love of New York, and his predilection for Champagne.

Have you been traveling lately? Where were you and what were you doing?

I've really been traveling a lot recently, almost exclusively for work. I spent the first half of January in L.A. preparing for an exhibition I was having there, and then the rest of the month plus February traveling in Canada. I stopped off in New York again for a couple of nights before heading back to L.A. to check up on some production that I was having done there. Now I am writing to you from a bus somewhere between East Lansing and Detroit in Michigan. I was there for an exhibition at the new Eli and Edythe Broad Museum at Michigan State.

What prompted your recent move to New York?

My wife and I have always planned on being in New York. We both lived here independently in the past but could never really figure out a way of making it work, either logistically or financially. She is a fashion designer, so for both of us it was an obvious place to go to move forward with our careers and increase our quality of life.

Was there an adjustment period in regard to getting used to working in a new studio space?

No, not so much. The space I am in now feels a lot more domestic than the last space I was in, which seems to make all the work feel warmer somehow. I have basically been making most of my new work outside of the studio though, so my studio time has pretty much become exclusively related to research and writing. It's a real luxury.

What are you working on at the moment?

I am working on a few different projects at the moment, all of which might end up being a part of a solo presentation that I have coming up in Basel, Switzerland this June. For one of these projects I have started collaborating with a camouflage designer named Guy Cramer. He has a company in Vancouver called Hyperstealth Biotechnologies and is regarded as one of the most accomplished in this field. I don't want to say too much about the project before it's totally resolved and shown, but

on a general level we are working together to generate motifs based on different and unusual urban environments. Think Upper-East-Side-camo.

Is there something particular that appeals to you about being able to blend into an environment?

I don't think it's the idea of invisibility that is so interesting to me as much as the idea that camouflages takes on its chroma and form based on the environment of intended use. This idea of environmental influence was a big point of interest for me in the cyanotyping project as well.

Where have you tried exposing the plates for your cyanotypes thus far, and how have the final images varied depending on where you've exposed them?

I have started only making the cyanotypes in L.A. I often refer to the history and mechanics of cinema in the work that I make, and in creating this body of work there I think it develops a nice affinity to this history. Most major film production companies started to move to L.A. in the early 1900s. Although this was in fact after the invention of the electric light bulb, these bulbs were still not powerful enough to develop images onto film, so filmmakers became very heavily dependent on the quality of the sunlight to make their films. I would like to think that by making this body of work there I am embedding the history of that medium into the work in a small way.

In your most recent exhibition at Blum & Poe you housed some of the laser cut pieces in custom road cases similar to those used by musicians on tour. What made you decide to incorporate them as a presentation method? Do they reference something for you personally?

The road cases are really about the temporary nature of an exhibition. When I was working on a show for that space, which measured close to 10,000 square feet of exhibition space, I felt like I needed to break it up somehow. This brought me to thinking about the display conditions established by the artist, which get to leach off the existing architecture of a space for a specific period of time, before they end up being relegated to the dustbin. By making the walls into cases that can effectively both ship and display the work after the exhibition it became a way of preserving the exhibition's design after the fact, while developing a sort-of constellation that consistently refers back to its originally displayed environment.

Where are you hoping to go in the future that you haven't yet had a chance to visit?

I really haven't spent much time in Asia. I would love to go to Japan!

If you were to design a hotel, what would be its distinguishing features?

Minibars would be free and the taps would pour Champagne. •