



COBY KENNEDY: AN ARTIST COMFORTABLE WITH PUSHING BOUNDARIES

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The Coming Of The Thuggernaut [Illuminated Manuscript lost Page]

Coby Kennedy is a multidisciplinary artist who is not afraid to speak his mind. Whether through his artwork, his actual voice (as heard in his multiple podcasts) – and now a docuseries on All Arts/PBS & Films. Currently, he is exhibiting at Superchief Gallery in his solo show *Jimmy Crow and the Imaginary Thug*, an exhibition which centers around a narrative of afrofuturism, born from America's dark history of racial conflict and set in a near future world directly reflecting today's mass media and propaganda.



Jimmy Crow and the Imaginary Thug, a solo exhibition

Coby Kennedy is one of 16 Brooklyn-based visual artists being featured in the new “Flowstate” docuseries by All Arts/PBS & Cyprian Films, chronicling their work during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. His episode will premiere Monday, March 15th online and then on Wednesday, March 17th via broadcast television.

Where to begin? I see you Coby as being a true visionary, with so many creative fields as your comfort zone. Honestly I am amazed I hadn't crossed paths with you before the show at Superchief Gallery. I am grateful I did as now I want to know so much more about you as you have an infectious personality.

How did you find Superchief Gallery – or did Superchief Gallery find you? Incredible roster and you fit in perfectly with so many artists I enjoy.

Heyyyy, thanks Nicole. Well, Ed and I went to the same undergrad but at slightly different times and had a lot of mutual friends.

Fast forward a decade or so and we re-linked up through a friend in the early days of Superchief. They were just starting to hit the accelerator on the gallery and I jumped on, at first, for a few group shows back then. A bit later (and I'm sure I'm getting years and chronology AAALLL mixed up), they asked me to curate a show in the space. I put together a jam with three artists I love: Esteban del Valle, Miguel Ovalle and Kajahl Benes.



I appreciate you allowing me to watch you work behind the scenes as the latest show came to life in front of my eyes. Which piece resonates most with you and why?

That would be a hard question if you'd asked me on opening night. I genuinely have a **STRONG** autobiographical love for them all in different ways and at different times. But now I'd have to say that the big kinetic sculpture, *Skin Of The Thugg* is hands down my favorite. I sat with it on the opening night and had the strong feeling that there were ways it could connect better with the audience.

I decided to come back the next day and revamp parts of it that weren't doing it for me, and now the thing is an absolute BEAST. The guts really read as guts, the wounds on the outer skin of the husk actually sweat profusely. And I can't get over the fact that as its malt liquor blood pumps through its body, the veins throb in time with its pulse. I get kind of hypnotized seeing a real Thuggernaut body part, standing there in the middle of a room chugging away, trying to hold onto its second chance at life.



Jimmy Crow and the Imaginary Thug, a solo exhibition

What were you thinking about while creating the pieces for this show? Anger at what is going on in the world? Rage? The pieces are so powerful that I wonder what was the driving force behind this body of work.

Y'know, I think everything I do has the through line of subjective realities.

The emotions run the gamut for me in the studio, but anger is definitely one of the strongest. Once you pull the blinders off and see the undiluted truths of the current world we live in, it's hard to not be either angered beyond control or sickened to death.

Most of the work in this show was made while literally wanting to kill somebody. After Philando, Breonna, George Floyd, and countless others, anger overflowed. I trashed my room multiple times. Like much of Black America all my mind wanted to do was get revenge on the cops and individuals that brutally murdered these people.

I channeled that into the deity that appears in this show and that's where the mythical Jimmy Crow comes from. A nine foot tall, faceless, horned being of vengeance, manifested in physical form from centuries of pain, torture and murder of the Black Diaspora. A specter of reciprocity through destruction and Black salvation through mythology. Instead of going vigilante, I decided to live vicariously through Jim as he crushed the heads of these cops and sadistically tore them limb from limb in the narrative that appears in my sculptures, 2D works and videos.



I too share a love of fashion, music and art and hold a B.F.A. in Sculpture. If you had to tell me your favorite medium – what would it be? Any mediums you want to try but have been scared to dive into? Or are you a fearless creative?

I only recently realized that I grew up in a bubble. I was raised around people that lived and breathed capital A.R.T.. They saw all aspects of life as being artistic; in the way you walk, talk, eat ice cream, paint, dance, jump, stand in an elevator, etc. So later on (2008), when I found out that there are artists out there who only do ONE THING?!! I was floored and honestly culture shocked.

I still really have a hard time wrapping my head around that concept and can't imagine it for me. I'm absolutely open to exploring anything artistically... I was going to start an Only Fans that was purely super erotic, mega progressive music videos of my songs that I produce. Believe you me, it would've been PURE AVANT GARDE!!

But no, really. Pure fire.

Your capes, love of music and thirst for knowledge excite me. I enjoyed listening to your podcasts with different outlets and wondered if all of these platforms are of constant interest to you now? They are all creative areas – all visual – so what would I find you creating on a daily basis?

I love pretty much all forms of creation. I was talking to a friend this week about the act of finding out what your true foundational drive for existence is, and mine is to create. If I couldn't create I would lose a HUGE amount of impetus for existence. I love making visual art, music, films, animations, shoes, fashion, mythologies, industrial design, cars, bikes, gourmet culinary creations... the list goes on. You could definitely find me any day indulging in one or more of these at a time. My insta-live weekly vid-cast last year, Art Studio Quarantine Culinary Cooking With Coby Kennedy was a BLAST!! That needs to be resurrected now that I think about it.



The Divinity Of The Thuggernaut [Illuminated Manuscript lost Page]

The PBS special is outstanding! Please tell our audience how that came about and what you hope we take away from the film.

I won't get too deep into it, but that came about by having solid relationships with solid people that believe in what you do. I've been lucky to be down with friends and professional associates that have stuck by me for years. We respect the hell out of each other's grind and hustle, but beyond that we just dig each other as people. I love putting people on. Whether it's grabbing them for a show I might curate, suggesting them for an arts residency or grant, offering to fly them to a show of theirs that they can't get to because I have a little more cash flow at the time, or just planning a course of animosity together. It's always great to spread the success around.

I think the thing that I want people to take away from the Flowstate piece, beyond my studio practice, is the fact that there's so much more to the world of fine art than the four or five guidelines that your particular mainstream art worlds blatantly or surreptitiously impose on you the artist, the audience, and the collector class.

What is next for you? Upcoming shows? New collaborations?

This summer I have a large sculpture opening at Pioneer Works here in Brooklyn. It's a full size plexiglass recreation of the solitary confinement cell that Kalief Browder spent hundreds of days locked inside of, while on Rikers Island. I'm super amped that the public is getting a chance to see this; it's a very personal piece for me. Getting it shown, since before Pioneer made it possible, has been a long time in the making.

Events-wise, I'm just back from filming in Detroit. I was shooting my short five minute film that looks at the growing travesty of America under this new administration. The film looks at our nation, worn out from four years of insanity. Accepting anyone else as figurehead no matter how blatantly questionable they may be. And presents it as the wordless, dystopian, near future futile fight of a people doomed to usher in their own oppression.

It's called Meet The New Boss... (... same as the Old Boss).

It's a family film, gonna be a ton of fun.

Can you kindly tell me something regarding your art form that you never told another journalist before?

Oooof... this one's hard. I have a ton of gems to tell, but legally I REALLY shouldn't.

Is there any advice you could share to inspiring artists about the art community and how the art world works?

Heheh, I could literally spend HOURS on this (earlier today I actually did). But I'll keep it short and sweet. It's good for an artist to know the lay of the land, but more importantly know what kind of artist you are in the first place.

The Art Worlds (big plural) are vast, varied and plentiful. Fame doesn't exactly equal Finance, and Finance usually comes without Fame. Many of the Mainstream Commercial Fine Art Worlds (the McFAW) operate as industries and aren't necessarily as much about creativity as they are about filling an agenda dictated by that industry's particular tastemakers.

So recognize if you are an artist that needs to pull total creation from the gut and to hell with the naysayers – or – if you are an artist that can comfortably mold your creativity to suit the thematic & aesthetic guidelines etched in stone by the influencers of your targeted art worlds. Either way is perfectly fine and (I guess) totally valid. I'd just hate to see any of you spend years banging at the concrete doors of any particular art world circle that will, for all intents and purposes, never even let you in the foyer.

Once an artist's audience finally discovers them, many successful artists are surprised at who their audience actually turns out to be.

<https://beautifulbizarre.net/2021/03/12/coby-kennedy-superchief-interview/>