



## STUDIO VISIT



Portrait and studio shot by Violet Shuraka

## Anthony Miler

Q AND A WITH VIOLET SHURAKA

**You live and work in Brooklyn, NY. How long have you been in the city and what brought you to New York?**

I've been in NY for 10 years now. New York brought me to New York, grad school paved a way for me to arrive here and stay for a bit.

**Can you imagine leaving NY for another place at this point in your life? What might tempt you away? Do you feel inspired by New York City itself?**

I always want to get away, but just for a bit. Wouldn't most of us be tempted away to a Mediterranean climate if we didn't still need to

stay in closer physical contact with this place for many reasons?

In terms of feeling inspired, I've never believed much in inspiration. Not sure why, but I suspect that notion is on some other side of a luxury of boredom.

**Have the places that you grew up (Toledo, Ohio and Adrian, Michigan) influenced your decision to become an artist and/or your work? Did you know that you would be involved in the arts from an early age?**

I don't think so, and no.





Studio wall



Maybe the isolation felt in those places effected the person, which in turn must effect the social and political positions. At an early age I didn't know what was what. I drew a lot because I loved it. I didn't know what an artist was. I'd like to think some of that can be preserved, doing the thing because one loves it, and so far it seems possible.

**You have an amazing studio in Bushwick/Ridgewood and have been there since 2011, have you witnessed a drastic change in the neighborhood over the past few years?**

The first year was pretty desolate, which I loved. Gradually it's been getting busier, more art kids seem to be moving in. Last year it must have doubled. And now a new studio building is opening on my block. Hmm...

**Do you predict that more NYC galleries will move out of Chelsea and the Lower East Side to Brooklyn? Can you envision the NY art world being centered in Brooklyn eventually?**

I think galleries that aren't centered in blue-chip work will have to move out of Chelsea eventually. The rent must be going crazy. I heard the Luncheonette is closing, which is sad. But I don't see Brooklyn becoming a center. Sadly, it looks like permanent physical space may be less important for staging exhibitions, as fairs and online platforms keep growing at the present rate. Maybe a rigorous approach to pop-ups could be interesting, if done well. I think Brooklyn will keep growing as a place to spend time and money on good food, despite the gross over-proliferation of mediocre 'approved' murals...

**The work I saw in your studio consists of a mixture of figurative oil paintings—ranging in size from very large, over 10 feet in height, to much smaller in scale—drawings (lots and lots of them!), and some mixed media works. Has the figure always been the main subject matter in your work?**

Not always directly. But in some way perhaps the figure has always indirectly been involved. Over a decade ago I was making these minimal, fluid, process based paintings with biting conceptual attitudes about them. These were very much oriented around and involved the body, both in how the fetish object oriented itself to the viewer, and in how they were made. So, body/figure even in its literal absence... These days it is more of a pictorial use.

**Could you describe your process when beginning a new work on canvas? How do you decide at which size you will work? What are the different stages you go through before you know a painting is complete? How many pieces might you be working on simultaneously?**

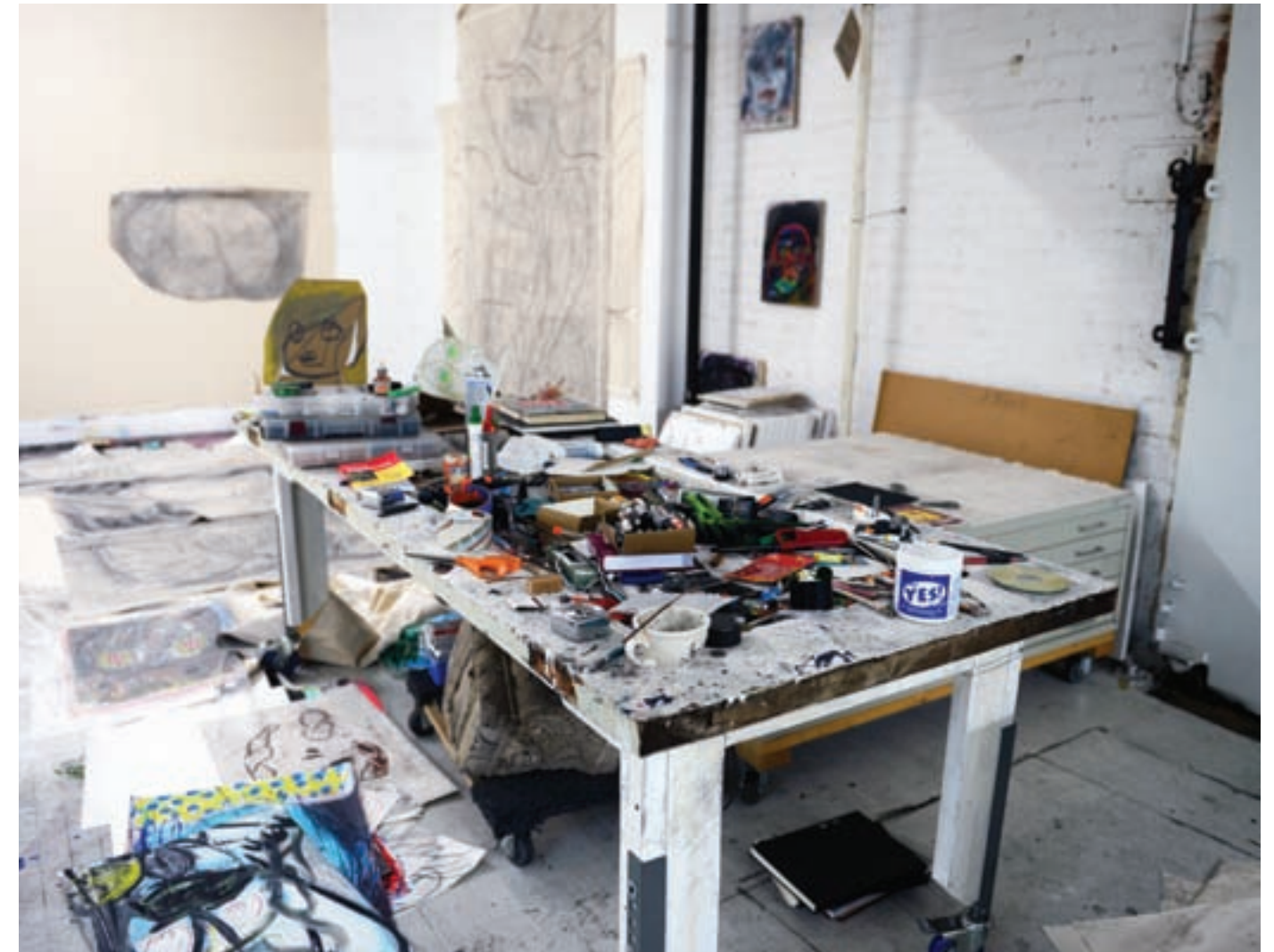
I don't know where to begin here. Which may be similar to the process, so I just begin. Using whatever resources are there. I don't predetermine rhyme or reason. In fact I go out of my way to avoid pre-emptive controls too rigidly described in textual language. Although it's still important that I'm aware of much of what is operating functionally or materially in overarching ways, things that I've agreed upon with the work.

**When starting a new painting do you reference your drawings or do you begin working directly on the canvas without any reference point? Does it vary from piece to piece?**









This varies. And the success of it varies as well. I like to live with things for a long time. This way you see it like someone else who will live with it. You see it in so many different mind states, and it has to be able to stand up to these different states. As far as sketching before hand, it's becoming more and more part of my process, but I still keep it at arms length in different ways, because the images must be alive, there cannot be a feeling of stasis from copying. Collage has become for me a form of planning shapes and lines that often end up being attached instead of re-drawn.

**You sometimes work on the floor (and maybe move the piece onto the wall at some point or vice versa) and you do not mind your work "getting dirty" by being walked across by humans (and kitties), whereas many artists treat their art as if it is very precious and have a "no touch" rule in place for others besides themselves. Are you making a statement about process and/or the art world by treating your canvases in this manner?**

Yes, I'm consciously aware there are many things in operation here. I'm glad some of these are noticeable. These are the very things that are precious, no?

**Your work combines abstract forms with expressionistic, child-like, sometimes cartoonish, painting/drawing of the figure and of faces,**

**with a gritty application of a variety of mediums. The energy you expel while creating the work shows through in the aggressive scribbles and gestural brushstrokes, which combine to form your subject matter. It seems that you are very active while creating, many of your canvases look as though they have been assaulted. I don't imagine you sitting still, painting in small details with tiny brushes. Is this a realistic description of how you work? Do you consider the creation of a work a performative action?**

It's a pretty accurate description of process. I might slightly disagree with certain aspects of the visual description. And at times I definitely do my share of sitting. As a counter-narrative—I remember recently contemplating covering just a square inch on one part of a painting. This contemplation went on for a few days and then finally on the 4th or 5th day I applied the mark with the drying brush that still lay on the floor from a painting session days before. It took maybe 10 seconds, but those ten seconds changed everything, at least to me. Those 10 seconds, though hardly an assault, embodied all the fulfillment of a successful day of painting. It was a feeling of solving something. But yes, usually it's much more active. I think in dedicated consistent practice, action can reveal a different and in some ways more poignant intelligence, with cautionary layers peeled back or abandoned altogether.

**Your works range from extremely colorful to monochromatic. A lot of**

**the larger canvases currently in your studio are black and white. Do you go through phases where work tends to stay within a particular color palette or does your use (or non-use) of color depend on your mood on a particular day?**

I don't know about mood. I think reasoning is faceted, sort of knit like a fabric through and through. It must be, no? I remember times when I worked mainly in black and white because of monetary cost, on both sides—having no money for paint and the also having plenty of paint so wanting to abandon the obvious.

**What helps you to develop your ideas?**

Working, looking.

**Do you feel more influenced by looking at the work of other painters and artists or do you feel that you are more stimulated by the massive amount of visual information you are exposed to on a daily basis, through advertising, the internet, television, etc?**

More influenced or more stimulated. I'm not sure, and I'm not sure it's the same question. I actually don't feel like I have a massive amount of stimulation from media. Its presence is there, sure, looming almost in threat, as an option, but I spend a lot of time alone, or away from it as well. I spend more time watching the sky than I do videos, ads, social media etc. This choice makes me happy.

**Who are the characters that appear in your paintings/drawings? Are they your friends, lovers? Are they self-portraits? Are these characters based on strangers you might have seen in the street?**

**Do the figures mostly come from your imagination? Or some combination of all of the above?**

Lovers are, at times, a large part, and are the only way I can make any sense of the word 'inspiration'. Rarely friends. Never strangers. Never monsters. Never aliens. I'm firmly engaged with humans. I'm firmly engaged in making paintings. Not interested in fantasy. But most often these characters are simply made through the circumstance of shapes. No matter what the figure is, even if it's clearly an animal, such as a dog or horse, I think they exhibit emotions that are clearly human. Sometimes almost apologetically so...

**Many of the figures also possess both male and female sexual characteristics (a figure might have breasts and a penis with long hair). Do you consider the gender of your subject or are the figures assigned sexual "parts" randomly?**

Not random.

**Is there a narrative running through your work?**

Some individual images can be narrative-like in ways, and as a side, I am cultivating a visual language over time, which then has aspects of visual vocabulary so could in various ways construct narratives and meta-narratives, but this isn't a primary focus. A lot of care is taken in deciding certain overarching aspects of the work as a whole. I don't know how to explain this at all clearly in a brief setting like this because I don't want to name something and give people the opportunity to run with it singularly, simplified, or generalized. Reality is too faceted and cultural work too





important to generalize and wade around in language like this wetting our feet, and again there are so many risks even in saying this. These paradigms between action and question are always present, wondering how many doors we close with the force needed to make meaningful headway. Have I gone off track already? Whatever, I think a lot about what it means to me to be painting at this time. What appearance of meaningful participation in culture might look like at this moment. I think the terms I'd like to use would be alarming to many, but I think it's necessary, and at the same time I'm not yet prepared speak accurately in words about violence, protest, cultural abrasion, desperation, etc..., and I'm still mining ideas about positive uses of existentialist thought. This is some of what I think about, or talk about with friends. Narrative? I don't know. I'm interested in our functional narrative as humans, and the possibilities of painting's material narratives in the many faceted ways it may operate synonymous to weaponry within its means. I don't mean to fancifully try and claim more territory for painting or for artists than their due, but I of course want to maximize its agency as well as my own.

**Is there a certain time of the day when you work best and are most productive? Do you have certain habits that you stick to in regards to your art making schedule?**

No, except that I try to work every day. Accidentally waking up at 4am and working are sometimes the most productive days, but more often I work in the afternoon and evening. In the mornings I often work on small drawings by a window.

**What ultimately do you want people to walk away from your work feeling or thinking?**

If they walk away feeling and thinking then that is enough. It seems too many things have me just walking away.

**You told me that you were going to start working more on sculptural work. What sort of materials do you envision using in this work?**

I've been working with cardboard for awhile now, and used to work with plaster and wood some a few years ago. I'd imagine some combination of these, and clay. I've been really wanting to get back into clay for quite some time. Haven't worked with it since undergrad.

**What projects are you working on now? Do you have any shows up currently or in the near future?**

Yes, currently working on a small book of images, and planning a solo booth at NADA this May with the Bushwick gallery ART 3. Quite excited for these next few months.