

KEITH BOADWEE

INTERVIEW BY HANS KRISTEL

The first exhibition I remember seeing in Berlin was in 2006 at KW, called *Into Me / Out Of Me*, curated by Klaus Biesenbach, who had founded the space over 30 years ago. Over 150 international artistic positions were shown, visualizing the imagined descriptive and performative acts of the primordial relationship between the internal and the external. This show had not much that was "beautiful," but almost everything sucked me in like no other show did before. I was shocked.

It was like being in a mixer and shaken around. Still today, I can recall many pieces that have since then stuck in my head. Maybe this is one reason I started working in the arts (at that time, I didn't know much about it). One of the works was by the American artist Keith Boadwee who showed the photograph *Purple Skirt* (1995). It shows a man who squirts blue liquid paint out of his anus.



HB For people who don't know your old work (there might be some in Europe) it is quite a surprise to see the change from your 90s work, that are very bodily to your current paintings. What happened to the in-your-face sexuality and human fluids?

HB I still make my "anema" paintings which are, of course, scatological. I make photos that are very explicit/sexual. My drawing and collage works are focused primarily on shit and pornography. My in your face sexuality and human fluids are still very much present. I can understand how one might think these things went away as it is the newer works that are getting most of the attention right now. I'm good with that. I don't have to make one kind of art exclusively. I think these new works are surprising to viewers who are more familiar with my earlier works. I like showing a side to me that is unexpected, gentle, wistful and melancholic.

HB The famous images of you squirting liquid paint on canvases in the mid-90s must have caused a lot of eyes-rolling or red-blushed faces. Not sure if today it would be much different. Do you experience a change or evolution in prudery?

HB I conceived and executed the first anema paintings in 1995. They caused a big sensation when I exhibited them at the infamous ACE Gallery that same year. For two decades, these works were the only thing that many people knew about me. This was somewhat frustrating as I had done many other things. I think now people understand the larger framework of my practice. As the audience is now more aware of my range, I'm comfortable with revisiting these works. I collaborated on a series of these paintings with AA Bronson for the Salzburger Kunstverein in 2015. The paintings and documentation of this project have also become well known. The original anema paintings were very ab-ex. The newer works are more complex and include compositions of flowers, plaids (made with AA) and "god's eyes" (a geometric, "spiritual", form appropriated from indigenous cultures of North and South America).

I don't think so much about prudery. I'm very comfortable with my body and other bodies. I'm a nudest and exhibitionist and highly sexual. That said, is bodily/sexual images didn't provoke or titillate, wouldn't they be less powerful as art? Of course America, where I live and work, was founded by Puritans and still maintains a strong streak of puritanism. This obviously contextualizes the work in a specific way.

HB Next next question are actually three questions: What music do you listen to? What makes you dance? Which song makes you cry?

HB I listen to a lot of music. I was a successful groupie for a while and have a history of hanging out around musicians and bands. My musical taste is very eclectic but dominated by rock. My formative years for music were the 60s through the 90s when rock was still a dominant musical form. I suspect now it is considered the music of the patriarchy. Today, parents and children share music. I loved rock because my parents hated it. Glam, British Invasion, Britpop, indie, punk, and new wave are high on the list. I also love soul, disco and old school R & B which were all very popular when I was listening to the radio and buying 45s in the 60's and 70s. I can dance to all of this music. The music I can't/don't dance to is "dance music". Hahahaha.

I'm a big crier so lots of songs make me cry. "TV Movie" from Pulp's "This is Hardcore" gets me everytime.

HB When I saw what you will show in Berlin at the gallery Dittfrich & Schlechtriem I thought directly of a famous work: Martin Kippenberger's piece Zuerst die Füsse (The Feet First) from 1990. This is what I thought of when I saw your paintings you will show. I thought how funny must the artist be, just like what I thought when I saw Kippenberger's frog when I was a teenager.

HB I studied at UCLA with a German Painter named Roger Herman who is associated with Neue Wilden (a great artist and still working). This was the mid to late 80s. I was looking at a lot of German art during this period (which was very popular) and was very obsessed with Kippenberger at this time (and still today). Kippenberger was living in LA for a while (89-90). I used to see him around. I'm normally very gregarious but I was so starstruck by him that I could never bring myself to speak to him though I knew several students at Cal Arts who worked for him. I don't think people realize what a big impact Kippenberger had on Los Angeles/California artists even though he was there so briefly.

My frogs evolved from a frog painting by Otto Muehl. Muehl is problematic but also one of the greatest painters. Paul McCarthy introduced me to him and the rest of the Vienna Action group when I was studying at UCLA in 1987. My frogs were very savage at first but have become much more refined in the 5 years I have been painting them.

HB In December 2020 Nicole Eisenman opened together with you the show "Nicole Eisenman and Keith Boadwee" the FLAG Foundation in New York City. She got a grand and the show was part of it. Originally, she wanted you to hold the show alone but the foundation's statutes said she has to be involved that's why you did it together. You must have a very beautiful relationship. Tell us something about it.

HB Nicole now prefers they/them pronouns. I have known Nicole for more than 30 years. We have been close friends for the last 22 years. I can't speak about Nicole objectively. While we are friends and have a close personal relationship, I am still in awe of their talent and staggering genius as one of the true greats of contemporary painting and sculpture. Nicole is operating at a higher level than most other artists. So while we have a "normal" friendship, they are a hero/mentor for me (though Nicole doesn't like it when I call them my "mentor"). We have many points where our interests intersect but I would say the two big ones are our shared love of humor and figurative painting.

Nicole has been an incredibly generous friend and advocate for my work. They have stood by me and advocated for me at the lowest points of my career when no one else was interested. I can't overstate the importance of our friendship to my life and my career. Thank you Nicole! I love you!



