

Interviews - 13 August 2018

MEET CURATOR LOLITA CROS

By Vanessa Seis



Lolita Cros is an independent curator from Paris, based in New York City. Over the past few years Lolita has been making waves with her alternative venue choices, curating exhibitions all over the city from a Financial District Chinese restaurant to Brooklyn rooftops, demonstrating her unique visual lens. Lolita has worked with an eclectic mix of emerging and established artists, and is currently curator and art consultant for The Wing, a network of co-working and community spaces designed for women.

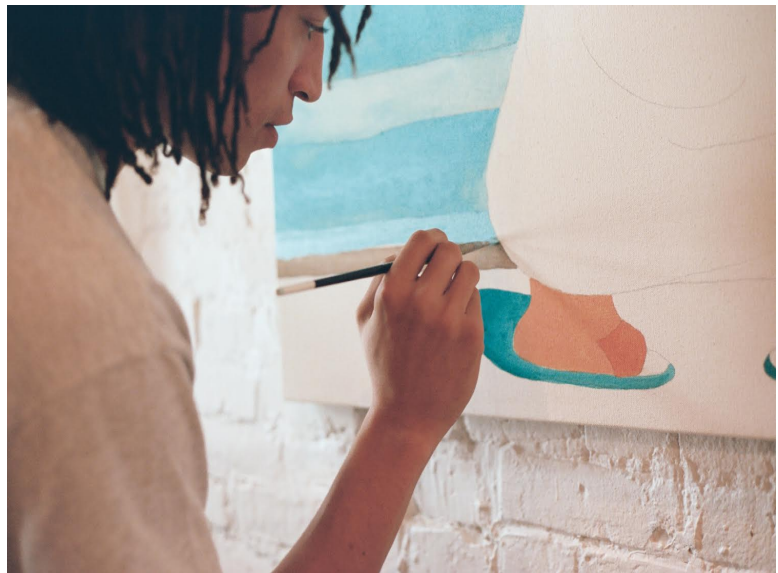
The Young Talent Exhibition at the upcoming Affordable Art Fair NYC fall fair, "You Can Lead A Horse to Water", will feature works by New York-based artist Chase Hall, whose cultural and political subject matter has led to a roster of international exhibitions and coverage such as in VICE, Vogue and The New York Times' T Magazine.

We sat down with Lolita to chat about the upcoming Young Talent Exhibition and her work as an independent curator.

INTERVIEW WITH LOLITA CROS, YOUNG TALENT EXHIBITION
CURATOR:

MOST RECENTLY, YOU HAVE BEEN FOCUSSED ON EXHIBITING AND PROMOTING THE WORK OF FEMALE ARTISTS THROUGH THE SALON AT THE WING. WHEN SELECTING AN ARTIST FOR THE YOUNG TALENT EXHIBITION, WHAT DREW YOU TO CHASE HALL, A MALE AND MOSTLY SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST?

In 2017 I had a studio visit with Chase and at the time he had been working in sculpture using cardboard and had just shifted his practice to paint. I was taken by his approach to painting; as a self-taught artist it can sometimes be hard to have your own voice and to not be too influenced by the work of others. Back then, he was still taking photographs in the morning and would regurgitate his thoughts on canvas in the afternoon. It's a very organic approach and says a lot about his process: he absorbs information and uses it for his practice. I'm so excited to have the opportunity to show his work a year later!



WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS FOR FINDING NEW TALENT AND HOW DOES YOUR INTERACTION WITH THE ARTIST EVOLVE FROM YOUR INITIAL ENCOUNTER WITH THEIR WORK TO AN EXHIBITION?

It really depends; I've met artists while going out in NY, others on Instagram, some have reached out to me... I keep an open mind and I try to schedule studio visits whenever I can, to learn more about the artist's practice. I kind of think of those studio visits as dates, sometimes it just clicks and that's when I know I'll be working more with that artist. Once we decide on what kind of space we want we'll start making a selection of venues and narrow down the pieces we want to show. It can be a slow process so setting deadlines is very helpful. Most of the artists I work with don't have gallery representation, so when I curate a show for them I tend to act as their gallerist for the length of the exhibition: I

manage the sales, the PR, make sure their voice is being heard and that their work is properly presented.

YOU HAVE QUITE A TRACK RECORD OF CURATING EXHIBITIONS IN UNUSUAL SPACES SUCH AS A CHINESE RESTAURANT, A ROOFTOP AND A TRUCK TO NAME A FEW. WHAT DRAWS YOU TO THE SPACES? ARE THERE ELEMENTS THAT YOU LOOK FOR?

Each location made sense for the artist or the type of work we wanted to show. Sometimes the artist and I decide on what space we want, and other times someone will come to me and offer me a space and from that I'll choose which artist would be the best fit for it. The truck came from my first studio visit with Esther Sibiude, she was working on a new body of work around the digestive system of the city:



how packages travel around the world and somehow show up to our door in the morning. It was important for us to create an immersive experience in a stationary truck and allow the viewer to pause and reflect on our narrative. The rooftop was at the McCarren Hotel, they offered me the space to curate a show and I directly thought of Rachel Libeskind and her performance "Ancient Baggage" which she had originally presented at the Festival di Spoleto. The piece was about the ritualistic aspect of traveling and "packing our bags," both literally and conceptually. We decided to present it as the sun was going down behind her to the sound of an opera singer.

FOR NEW COLLECTORS AT THE FAIR, WHO MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE CURATOR ARTIST DYNAMIC, CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT A CURATOR IS AND WHAT YOU FEEL YOUR ROLE IS IN AN ARTIST'S CAREER?

I think the job description has changed a bit in the last 10 years. A curator used to work mostly for institutions and would put together group or solo shows around a theme or a moment in the artist's career. Now a new wave of curators have emerged who are working with galleries, brands, or independently. My role is similar to that of an art dealer, since I

work closely with the artists to develop their market, and make sure collectors buy pieces for the right reasons. I also play the role of an educator - it's important for me to speak to an audience that isn't necessarily interested in buying, but rather in learning about artists. I like to think of a curator's role as being as mediator between the viewer and the artist.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST KNOW YOU WANTED TO BE A CURATOR AND WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS AND LESSONS IN YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

I've always loved learning about art and deep down I knew I would work with artists one day. Going to Bard College really made that possible, I was able to see artists in their studios first hand and had all the space in the world to curate shows. I curated my first show during my sophomore year, and pretty much knew at that moment that I would do it full time one day. The art world can be a bit opaque at times and I would say transparency

is my mantra: establish the costs from the start, make sure both parties understand, always involve the gallery when the artist is represented, be clear about commissions, and add an extra \$1,000 to any estimate you get just in case!



YOU WERE BORN IN PARIS. HOW DO EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN CULTURES INFLUENCE YOUR WORK?

Americans are very straightforward, and Europeans like to think. My job is both of those things combined: I'll spend the first part putting an idea into words and developing a concept with the artist and the second part figuring out budget and logistics to make it a reality.

THE YOUNG TALENT EXHIBITION, YOU CAN LEAD A HORSE TO WATER, ADDRESSES RACIAL BIGOTRY IN THE UNITED STATES. WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO CURATE AN EXHIBITION ON THIS TOPIC?

Considering the current state of the country/world, it's hard not to think about that. Racism is so specific to each country and having lived on 3 different continents (in France, Morocco and USA) it's interesting to see how each culture deals with it. Chase Hall's work is mainly about the racial bigotry in the US, which I find especially interesting because it's so deeply engrained in the country's history. Racial stereotypes show up unexpectedly in children's cartoons, advertisements, domestic objects, or garden ornaments; shining a light on these images and re-contextualizing these objects allows the audience to understand the root of the problem.



AS SOMEONE WHO DEEPLY ENGAGES WITH ART FORMS ALL THE TIME, HOW DO YOU APPROACH AND VIEW NEW WORKS?

In the art world something is "new" when it hasn't been approved by an institution or a gallery. I've learned to trust my guts and listen to my own judgments. That said, I've decided to never like or dislike something based on a first impression. There have been works I didn't necessarily connect with until I spoke to the artist about it, and vice versa. It's important for a work to have different levels: the work should be visually intriguing enough for the viewer to catch interest, and the concept behind the work should be digestible enough for people to want more. If both of these are well executed, anyone should be able to connect with the piece.

HOW DO YOU ENVISION OUR VISITORS' INTERACTIONS WITH CHASE'S WORK TO BE AND WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE YOU WOULD LIKE PEOPLE TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS EXHIBITION?

As the title says, You Can Lead A Horse to Water. But it will be up to the audience to drink it or not.