

KANTOR / FEUER GALLERY

TEXT: Ken Miller PHOTO: Michelle Cortez

SIMONE SHUBUCK



Simone Shubuck's drawings are strictly for the birds. And the flowers. And the knives, feathers, swirls, scary monsters and random quotes from *Method and Red*. (Got ya pimp nuts yet?) Pretty much everything except snails and puppy dogs' tails come out of her fertile imagination and ends up on one of her obsessively-worked, richly rewarding sheets of paper.

Wait, you have your answers written down in a notebook?

SS: I just have some notes in case I forget something. Like, I have Dr. Evil's therapy speech from *Austin Powers*.

What do you have on the wall of your house?

SS: Thomas Campbell's little mini skateboard thing. A Chris Johanson car. A piece by Margaret Kilgallen. Some paintings from Barry McGee — they go really nice with my Lower East Side apartment, because it's all off-kilter. I also have a picture of my friends shaking Ozzy Osbourne's hand. They heard him on the radio in Illinois and ran over to the station. He was totally wasted. The photo is amazing — one dude is giving the total 'bro' handshake, and the other guy is in the background with a headband on freaking out.

Your work has an 'exquisite corpse' kind of vibe... Is it tricky to control the layers on top of each other and to know when to stop?

SS: No... What I'm most interested in is the compulsion to obsessively work on these things until I can't put any more information in. And about

once every five years I'll make a piece that's incredibly restrained. But it's almost like I have to get all of this visual diarrhea out of my system before I can do that. I'm really trying to get a place where I can create something really simple. I think there's just an innate sense of doneness, when you're just like, 'Oh, that works.' Sometimes I go back to stuff that's five years old, and I'll start working on it again or erasing from it. That's the whole thing that keeps it really interesting — playing that game. I feel like, with drawing, it's a lot easier than with painting. With painting you could have a great thing going and then ruin it. Whereas, with drawing I can make all of these layers, and it's more interesting to show remnants.

Do you erase and backtrack?

SS: Yeah. I'll erase and add white just because it was too dense. Just to change the quality of it. I have the mindset that, if something gets a coffee stain on it, it looks better. That's just sort of my ideal.

How analytical are you when you work?

SS: It's non-verbal for me. It's really visual. And it's really kind of visceral

KING OF ART



and personal, I guess. So I don't think about it at all. If I start to have too many words and things like that, then I feel less free. So it is like going into this place where you can just go and then figure it out later. You're too involved to even really know any better. Rather than (focusing on) influences and all of that crap, I'm much more interested in just coming in here every day and doing it. In this monastic way, drawing — or anything — is meditative...

What would you be doing if you weren't drawing? I guess there's your day job working with plants...

SS: Yeah, that's such a fun other thing to do. I go to the 28th Street Flower Market — it's like a small little village in New York. You know everybody... It's like a weird TV show (with) all these characters. Then you come back here and deal with being alone all day. I would rather be here listening to music than have to talk to everybody all day. But if you only have to do that, and you're not in a good place... It's a lot to be alone with yourself, you know.

It also seems like, with the kind of drawing you do, there would be that temptation to sort of dive inward...

SS: Yeah, to be a hermit... I think what works really good for me, in terms of being able to work, is to just surround myself with time. Even with dinner plans sometimes, it's really just about all I can handle. I can never really get into (drawing) unless I have this whole stretch of time. And then if I need them, I have little lists. Like, I haven't made it, but I'm obsessed with making this Jay-Z drawing, where it has knives with all of his aliases: Sean Carter, J-Hova, Jigga, Jigga Man, Young Hov, Hovy, Hovito... It's like

this really weird obsessive-compulsive information collecting. Obviously, it has nothing to do with Jay-Z, but it has more to do with compulsion.

You use a lot of birds and flowers in your pieces...

SS: It's funny. I think I got into using these cheesy 'pretty' elements, but figuring out how to make them interesting. Like, how do you draw a flower so it's not just a flower? Or these birds — I went through one year where I was just obsessed with drawing these birds. And look at them... they're fucking scary! I was in a bird-themed group show with Jo Jackson and Cynthia Rojas last year. We realized we had this bird thread in common. But now I feel like birds are strangely trendy. Are you perceiving that?

Yeah, but most people are doing it in a really different, 'pretty' kind of way...

SS: Owls are trendy. Unicorns... always a hot classic.

The covers of these boxes (containing drawings) are kind of like canvases. Do you do ever work on canvases?

SS: No. It's something I'm thinking about... Maybe it's the next level of possibilities. It's just that, if you're interested in the learning curve, if you can let your ego go and be cool with sucking at something until you get on top of it, I think it's great. I think it's really hard, but it's so important to keep yourself in check.

Well, I have some random questions to ask you...

SS: What sneakers am I coveting right now?

Should I ask you that?

SS: I want a pair of vintage 3/4 Patrick Ewings, white.