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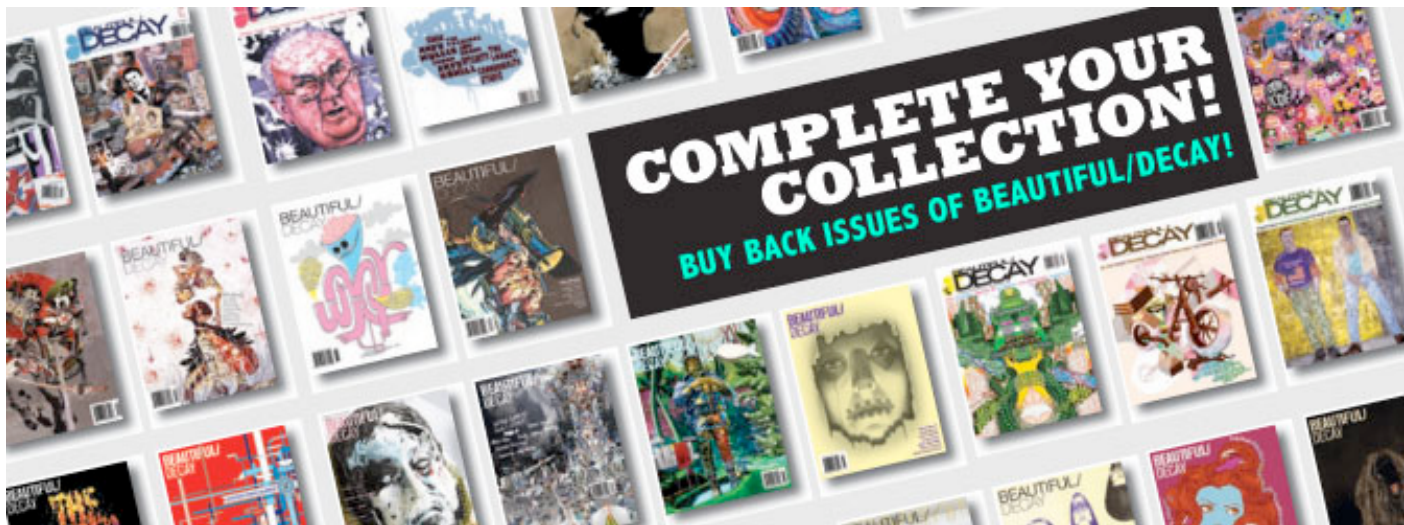


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## Keegan Mchargue Interview

February 14th, 2010 by [Ryan](#)



Always jazzed to find exceptional young talent like [Keegan Mchargue](#) . His color palettes, compositions, and ridiculously healthy body of work are but few of the numerous positive qualities found in Keegan's product. I was fortunate enough to have a series of exchanges with Mr. Mchargue and gain some further insight into his practice. Word

*Where do you live currently? What do you do?*

**K:** I live in Manhattan, New York. I make paintings and drawings, I also do some sculpture and choreography.



*How / when did you decide you wanted to make art? Is this something that you were encouraged to do or did you come about it on your own terms? What kinds of things were/are inspirational to your creative output? (Your [Tumblr](#) content aside)*

K: I come from an artistic household where creativity was always encouraged. My mother always used to have us do drawing exercises, like drawing things upside down and backwards. My mother also used to show us [Bosch](#) and old master works... really amazing stuff that started my early imagination wandering. As I am sitting at my parent's house doing this interview my mother is reminding me that as a kid I drew tens of thousands of shoes. I was obsessive. Still am.

At this particular moment I am most inspired by the idea of branding. I am interested in marketing and how things (art included) are packaged and sold. I have been reading a lot about [Edward Bernays](#) (who happened to be [Sigmund Freud](#)'s nephew) and learning a lot about what attracts people to objects and ideas on a psychological and subconscious level. I have been trying to imagine an audience before I even begin the work; my last body of work was geared towards children, and my new body of work, "Preteen" is directed to tweens and co., and even though this isn't my audience I would like to put people in that particular mind state through the work. At least that is the jump-off. I hope that these directions are obvious, but I have no idea if the finished products come off how the same for me as they do for others. I also don't know if that is important to me at all. In a way I think this gives my work a sociological and somewhat psychological component as well. It gives me a chance to look places where I normally might not find inspiration... well past my own interests sometimes and often I come away from the experience with a little broader view of the world.

My pool of inspiration is vast, not limited in any direction, and always changing. I take just as much inspiration from design, music, pop and consumer culture etc. as I do from high art. I have no real hierarchy when it comes to information and inspiration. It is a big world out there and everything is accessible, how can one not be inspired!



*As far as I can tell you didn't do art school, I always find people who went to art school have strong opinions about it for better or worse. What are your thoughts on art and academia from the other side of the coin?*

K: It sounds like it would have been nice to go to art school. Instead I went to school for literature. I still read a lot so it wasn't wasted on me, and I often reference that education in my work... probably more than I reference other art, so in that way I am happy with the education I chose. I am genuinely interested in art and it's history, so it is natural for me to want to gather as much information as I possible since I love it so much. I am a real archivist in that way.

Also, no one every told me NO, or said, "this looks too much like..." which I am thankful for. I also taught myself all of the techniques that I use, so stylistically I am very happy about that as well. It is all very much my own. Reflecting on it, I don't know if I would have been right for art school anyhow. I have tons of respect for the system, though, as many of my favorite artists of all time are also educators. All you have to do is listen to [John Baldessari](#) discuss his practice in conjuncture with teaching to realize how useful it can be in some artists' practice. Some people really thrive on this dialog.... I'm fine just doing my own thing for now.

Aesthetically, I think there is a lot to be said for the innovative notions that come from necessity. For

instance, I love to art of the record sleeve. All over the board, from genre to genre, some of the most amazing sleeves have been designed by people with no training in art or design. [Peter Saville](#), for instance, is untrained and has made some of the most iconic record sleeves of the last 30 years. Through his career, though, you see him learn the “real” way to design. He is just one easy example, of course. I think that the same concept goes with the music inside of the sleeves as well... Often people like a band or musician’s first recordings even if the artist continues to excel their craft. I think people like the feeling of “I could have done that,” that comes from a viewing or listening to something that is either within or just slightly out of their own reach artistically. I know that I do. But being untrained can only last until you are trained, then you are something else. And feigning naivety is insincere and unattractive.



*What is your process like? Do you have a concrete idea before you begin a piece or does it play out on it's*

*own? Do you use reference materials or do much sketching? What is your studio like?*

K: The cliché of the artist toiling away in their studio has never felt like my experience. I want to enjoy my time in the studio and for it to be fun. On days when I don't want to paint or draw I will sculpt or make music. Other times I will just do research or just sit and listen to music. It all informs me and works into the broader scope of what I want to achieve through my work. If I am not enjoying my work in the studio I am out of there. I don't want to put that kind of energy into my work.

On a practical level, I find you start to compete with the lack of space in New York if you don't have a great situation or a good system figured out, so you have to be strategic. I rarely work on more than one piece at a time. Luckily I have a great space here. My studio is simply a big white room in an old Catholic schoolhouse with one big table in the middle... I work best with that kind of clear space around me.

As for the work itself, I always have some sort of concrete idea before I start or else I get lost (sometimes all you want to do is get lost.) Sometimes it's as simple as a title or a concept. Then I make the drawings that I later transfer onto the canvas. After that it is virtually paint-by-numbers. I am not a virtuoso painter or anything... just a strategic one. What I lack in talent I make up for in trickery. I map out how to make the painting long before I start actually applying paint. I am always concept first, but when it comes to drawing it is really no-hold-bared. I also take time to make a lot of abstract work that stays in my studio. I learn a lot about my figurative work by making abstract work. I learn a lot about abstract work by working on choreography. I learn a lot about choreography by making music. To me it is all tied into a tight package and soon enough it is difficult to figure what inspiration came from where.

To be completely honest, though, my favorite thing is to work from home and watch TV while I paint.



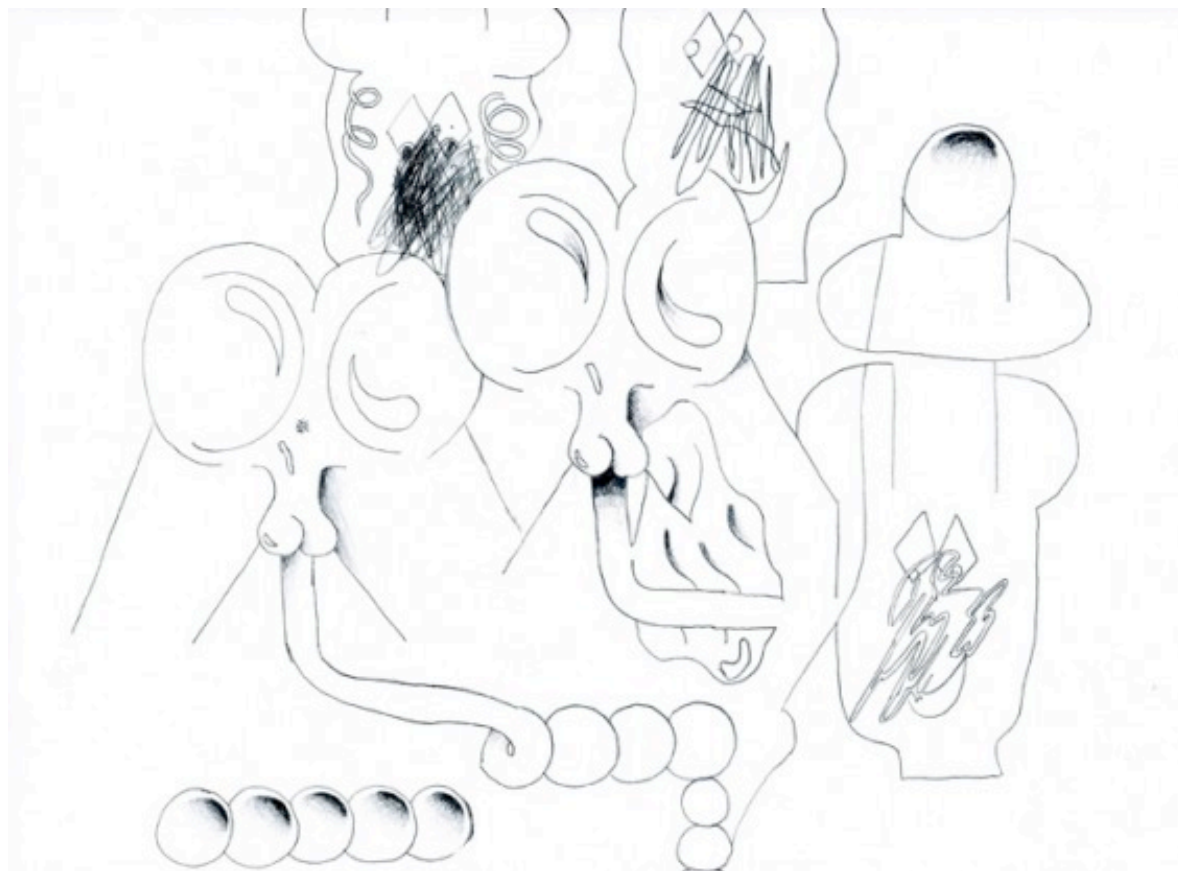
*Your imagery is wierd/mysterious to me. There is a feeling of narrative but not a definite one. Your spaces range from obviously interior to hard to say if that's a space or not. Could you tell me more about your work?*

**K:** My imagery is from all over the place, although I don't know how weird it really is. There are weird moments but a lot of my subject matter is the most everyday, mundane stuff... sometimes I think it even borders on the banal. But I like to think that banality is a place where the spiritual likes to hide out.

Sometimes I feel like a bored, daydreaming child, pulling pictures out of the air and allowing the “narrative” to propel itself. As I said, I don’t really like giving one image more power than another; in my world all imagery is created equal. It is all about how the images are assembled and the power they can gain through the context I put them in.

In the past, I have said very little about where I am coming from in all of this because I personally feel that it is best for people to attach their own meanings to the works. On a personal level, though, I have been developing this very particular lexicon that I draw from for years now. Certain images or motifs represent meaning to me and they repeat throughout the work for years. I am interested in making works that are not always bound to this psychical world or any particular place in time.

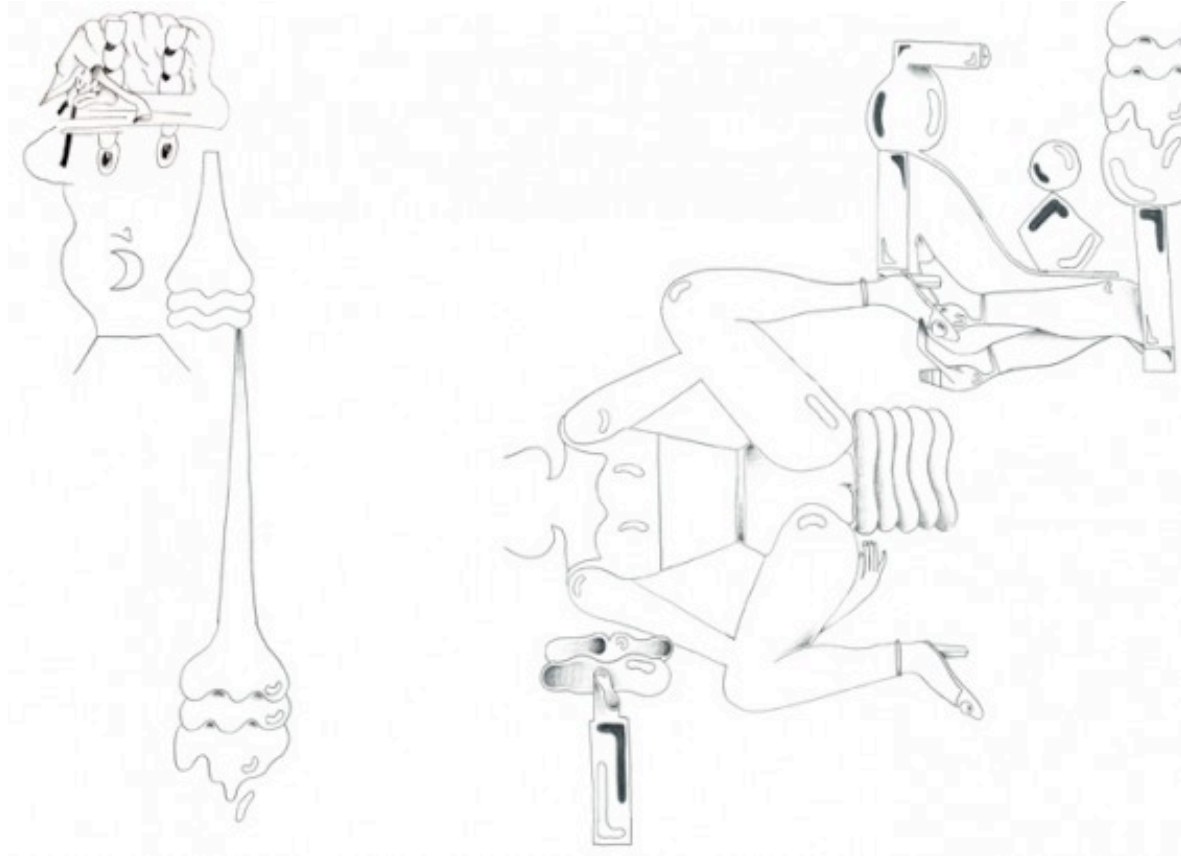
I can also be very referential in my work but I am process heavy, and by the time an idea has materialized and has been realized it has gone through a lot. Sometimes I cut images up and re-work them with my hands, and sometimes I use the photocopier or even Photoshop to distort things. I really don’t feel any boundaries when it comes to achieving particular results and whether or not all this process appears in the finished work feels irrelevant to me, they are just necessary steps along the way to a finished product.

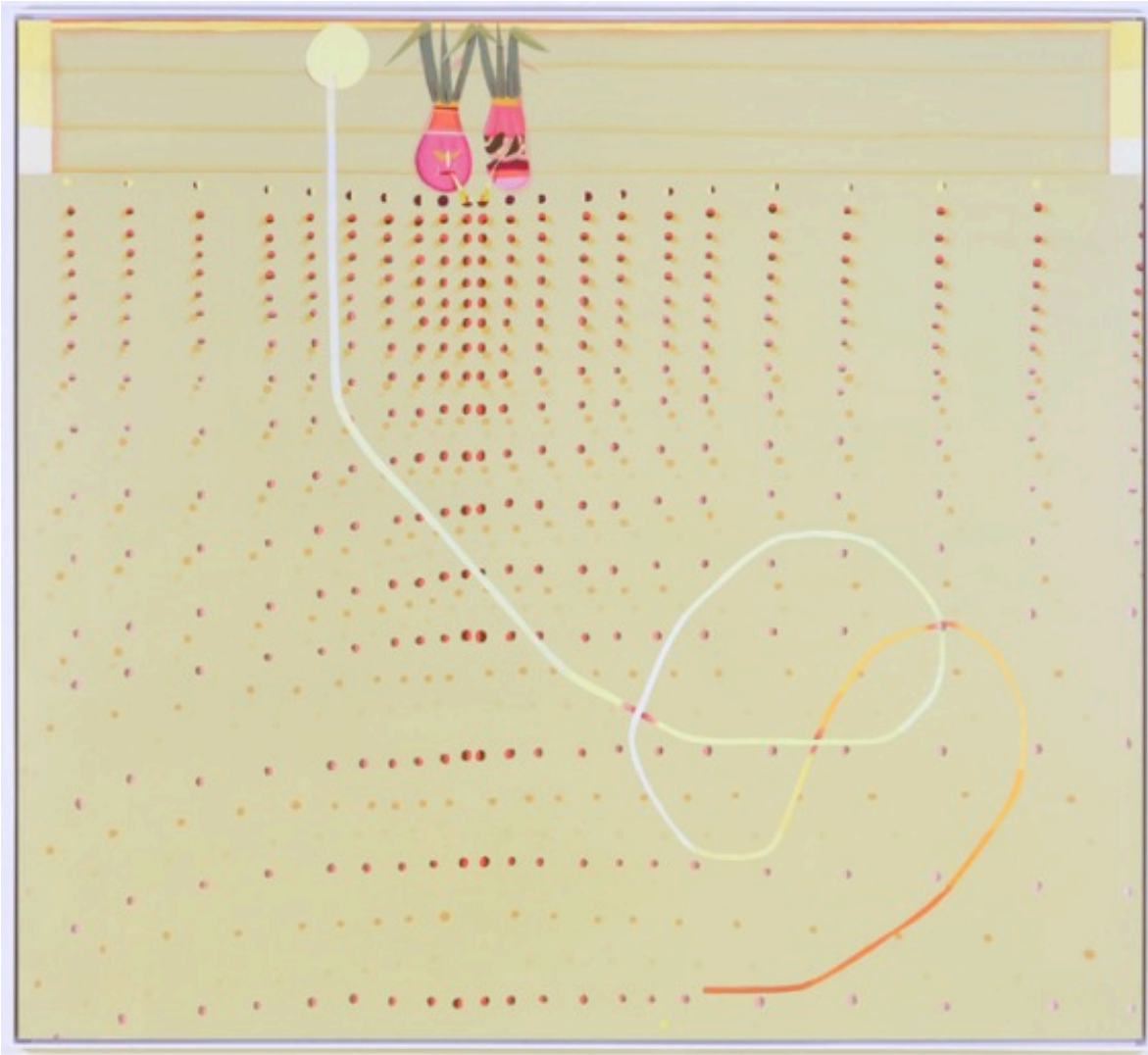


*Can you tell me a bit about the Foibles?*

K: The original idea was that the Foibles were a sort of family that has existed since the beginning of time and that they have been present ever time a gaffe or indiscretion of any kind has gone down. The Foibles are a tool for me, and I use them as a sort of medium to approach subject matter that I, at times, personally find too unsavory or difficult to explore on my own. Not to say that I’m not interested, mind you. The Foibles are out there seeing people in their lowest states, and reporting back to me. I illustrate what they find. What they find is the so-called human tragedy... lust, greed, conceit, etc. etc, etc. and what I like most

about it is just how funny it can be at times. Humor is a large part of my work, and what the Foibles have shown me is that the human condition can be tragic, but that you have to occasionally laugh about it all.





*A game I like to play when seeing art is, what band would this be or what sound would it have? As a fellow music/ art lover, what kinds of visual/ musical connections do you make?*

K: I have very strong visualizations when I listen to music. I attach images and colors to certain songs or sounds that I hear way more than I attach songs or sounds to particular artworks. Sometimes I do think about certain work of my own in terms of what I was listening to at the time it was made. Right now I am into a music genre I have dubbed Popcorn, and it definitely showing itself on the surface of my works.

One game that I like to play is trying to imagine what kind of music certain artists listen to based on their work. I really love to glimpse at artist's music collections, and I am always surprised to see what people are taking in aurally when they produce their work. Sometimes it shows on the surface, other times it very much doesn't. I don't think that the entire spectrum of what I listen to shows on the surface of my work.



*What would you coin the current movement(s) that are happening in the art world, like if it were 100 years from now and you are art historian?*

K: Hmmmm. This is a hard one, but “The Market Years” comes to mind right away. Perhaps that is a cynical perspective related to the 00’s. But now we have arrived in a new decade and things feel like they are changing really quickly. I have a feeling that artists are taking their practices back from the expectations of markets and dealers.

There are so many different things happening right now it is hard know exactly how it is all going to be perceived tomorrow, let alone 100 years from now. To be honest, I am skeptical that there will even be

people to discuss these things in 100 years if we don't change how we deal with one another. But that is another discussion.



+ if you missed the link above, check out Keegan's Tumblr page – [Mauve Deep](#)

Keegan works with ... [Metro Pictures](#), [Jack Hanley Gallery](#), [Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin](#), and [Hiromi Yoshii](#)

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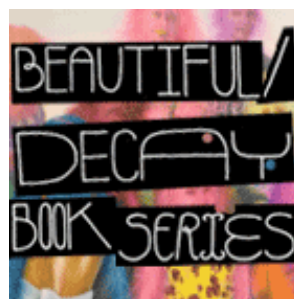
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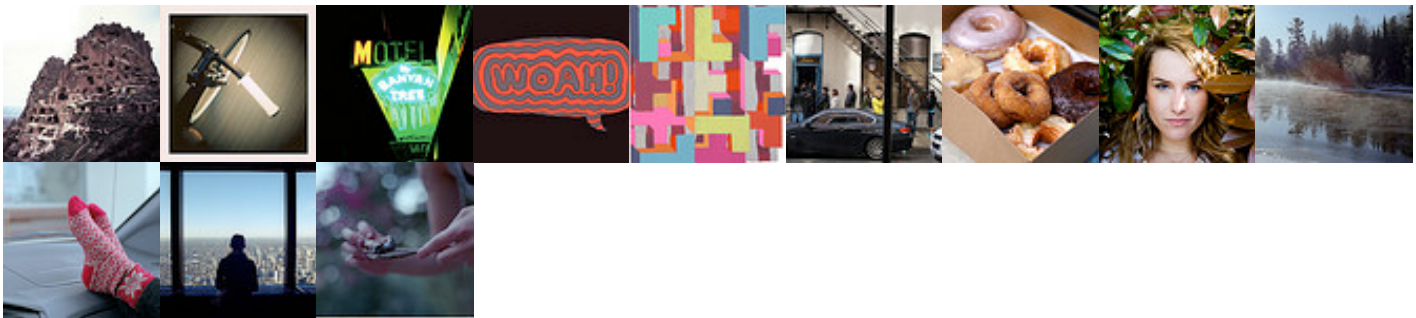
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