

WHITE FLAG LIBRARY

Cheryl Donegan

June 22 – August 24, 2013

How does your studio fit into your practice and into your life? And how has your practice as a studio based artist (even having made work explicitly about the studio) changed over the past twenty years or so?

I have a studio in my home, so I am constantly shuttling between the two domains. In a certain way, what connects them both is the computer (and I include the smart phone here) – I am sure this is true for many artists. The laptop and the Internet become a third domain, another type of studio and another type of “life.” I am looking at art online, I am shopping on eBay, I am posting images on Instagram, I am adding to my blog (yourplasticbag.tumblr.com). All this electronic activity allows me to act on hunches and impulses quickly. What happens in the studio then allows all this to slow down and I get to wrestle with it in a different way.

The more quickly I deal with images in a virtual way, the more slowly I want to deal with them in a physical way – I want the physical images to come more reluctantly, more primitively. I like that tension.

I think this has been the greatest change over the last twenty years or so. That, and having children.

What was the impetus to begin making eBay suggestions on your tumblr? It seems to represent the way you participate in the fashion world, of sifting through content, finding ill-fated designers lost to the past. How are you navigating these popular fashion histories and does that come to bare on your work?

One of my favorite Warhol quotes goes something like: “New York is so competitive; if you want to get anything, you have to want what no one else wants.” Genius! Words to live by.

I think that was the motivation for searching out forgotten designers on eBay. No one else was looking, so they were cheap. I learned this from years of looking in the flea market. One dealer told me that was the way designers like Marc Jacobs or Anna Sui did it. They’d be there in the early morning, combing the racks, taking things back to the studio to rework as their inspiration. I always thought that would be a good job for me – professional flea market shopper, because a lot of times I’d find something old that felt right, then six months later, I’d see a “new” version of it. Certain feelings for shape or cut or texture are just in the air. I found I had a good feeling for being in tune with it. When I started the blog, I thought I’d share this skill of mine, as really I don’t like to buy too many things. I find it a bit shameful to have too many things.

Intuition gets a bad rep in contemporary art. It’s like that moment in *Waiting for Guffman* where the actress says she is learning to ignore her intuition. It’s seen as somewhat suspicious or embarrassing. Perhaps it’s been abused being attached to old-fashioned ideas of individual, isolated genius. I don’t see it that way. There are always shared ideas in fashion, yet individual *takes* on these concepts are what makes things exciting. Right now I am interested in working with gingham patterns. Not because I think it’s an original idea, but as a way of getting at something about repetition, aliveness and failure.

You used to appear in your work, but have since stepped out of the frame. On your blog, you perform experiments with fashion on yourself. What has been the shift from being in the work to removing your hand from its production by a few degrees? What do you think a model means to a designer?

Yes, I was always a “model” in the early video. I thought of it that way, too – it wasn’t about me or my personality, more like I was hiring myself to do a job. Some viewers of the video *Head* actually expressed surprise that I was not more “sexy” in person. Can you imagine? I guess if you are in a video and it’s art, people think that it’s you. Odd. I find that boring. I guess that’s one reason why I got sick of being in the videos at a certain point. I needed another model. That became places, spaces, other people, other objects, even appropriated images.

Meanwhile, I was thinking back to the “model” thing and there is a 1997 video called *Artists and Models* that I made...so it’s been in the air for a while. Also a very strange (even for me...) video called *Alive/ Artist/ Model/ Pleasure* which was based on both the Newport cigarette campaign and a film of Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin where they do a production number called “Artists and Models”...I shot it at the local high school where I went using my youngest sister’s friends as actors...they were all born in 1980. So THAT’s a weird one...and there were others, *Stop Me if You Think You’ve Heard This One Before* has me re-performing Viva’s monologue from Warhol’s *Nude Restaurant*, bitching about how stressful it is to model and *I Still Want to Drown* ends with a shot of a model and has a model apartment in the video. I forgot to make the connections in my mind in a conscious way!

You are correct to observe that in my blog, I do “model” my own clothes in my “outfit” posts. I don’t mind. One reason is that young women under 35 do most personal style blogs, it seems. I am 51. I want to show that, so that is me. But I guess what connects the two gestures, the early video and the outfit posts, is a more or less indexical urge: here am I.

There are several examples of you imitating runway models and fashion lines, often pairing an image of a model with an image of you catwalking down the hallway of your wardrobe displaying a similar outfit you pieced together from your collection. This somehow has a relationship to your paintings. Both in terms of the ready-made aspect of your fabric choices and handling of them, as well as your relationship to the worlds of high art or high fashion.

I hope I don't get out of my depth here, but I think about Debord a lot, I guess, and how he spoke of the spectacle pretending to unite people but actually dividing them; how it is an imitation of life that robs the living. I don't claim to understand all of Debord's thought, but I want to think about how one goes about living with the awareness of spectacle. Imitation itself might be one way, as children imitate adult roles in their play. That always seemed to me a form of stress management. The readymade does come in there as you need props for your play, you need to re-assign meanings, circulate them. I like how self-consciousness lightens when you are engaged in this.

Koos Van Den Akker, a prominent figure on your tumblr, approaches design as painting on clothes, painting with fabric, all with a certain iconoclasm and play and appreciation of kitsch and popular culture – having designed the Cosby sweaters. It's very similar to your approach to painting. You posted a video in which Van Den Akker talks about straddling the line between ugliness and genius, which plays on notions of authenticity and intention, themes that are also relevant throughout your work and your varied materials and modes of address from the videos to the paintings – these questions that are also relevant to understanding and defining style, both in the artistic and fashion senses of the term. Can you speak to how you've imported some of these ideas and influences into your work and how you play with them in your studio?

Koos Van Den Akker! I really do love him and I think he's been such a stealth influence on a few top American designers, like Marc Jacobs particularly. Marc has such a wonderful feeling for American vernacular style. Everything from fast food uniforms to sports influence to crafting. And I think Koos was really there first. Koos' clothes were cheap on eBay up until recently, when a popular blogger started to post about him (not me). Then the prices skyrocketed and I haven't picked up too much recently. His feeling for pattern is amazing: I think people love patterns and clashing patterns so much now because it's a coping mechanism for the visual chaos that is all around. It's homeopathic. Like cures like.

The relationship between ugliness and beauty is very important for me. People think they want to understand art to like it, but I have to be slightly confounded in order to like it. Some resistance has to be there, but I like visual resistance. Rather than emotional or intellectual resistance. If I get it too much, it's not working on me. I find that resistance seductive. It's the same way with slightly ugly or strange looks, particularly when they involve proportion or shape. The Japanese designers understand this like no others, which is why I revere them.

How do paintings and clothes perform similarly? How do they differ? What are their roles and how do they play them?

Both clothes and painting are, to me, primarily visual. They create a visual effect that is communicative. In fashion, I am not concerned with luxury or label. It's the visual pleasure it creates. I remember once visiting an exhibition of Gianni Versace's clothes at the F.I.T. Museum with a friend who remarked: "His world was not very deep, but it was the most exquisite half inch ever."

I took it to mean that surface had depth. This remark has stayed with me for years. To me, painting is like that, too – a thinking surface. It's an intelligent surface, like skin itself.



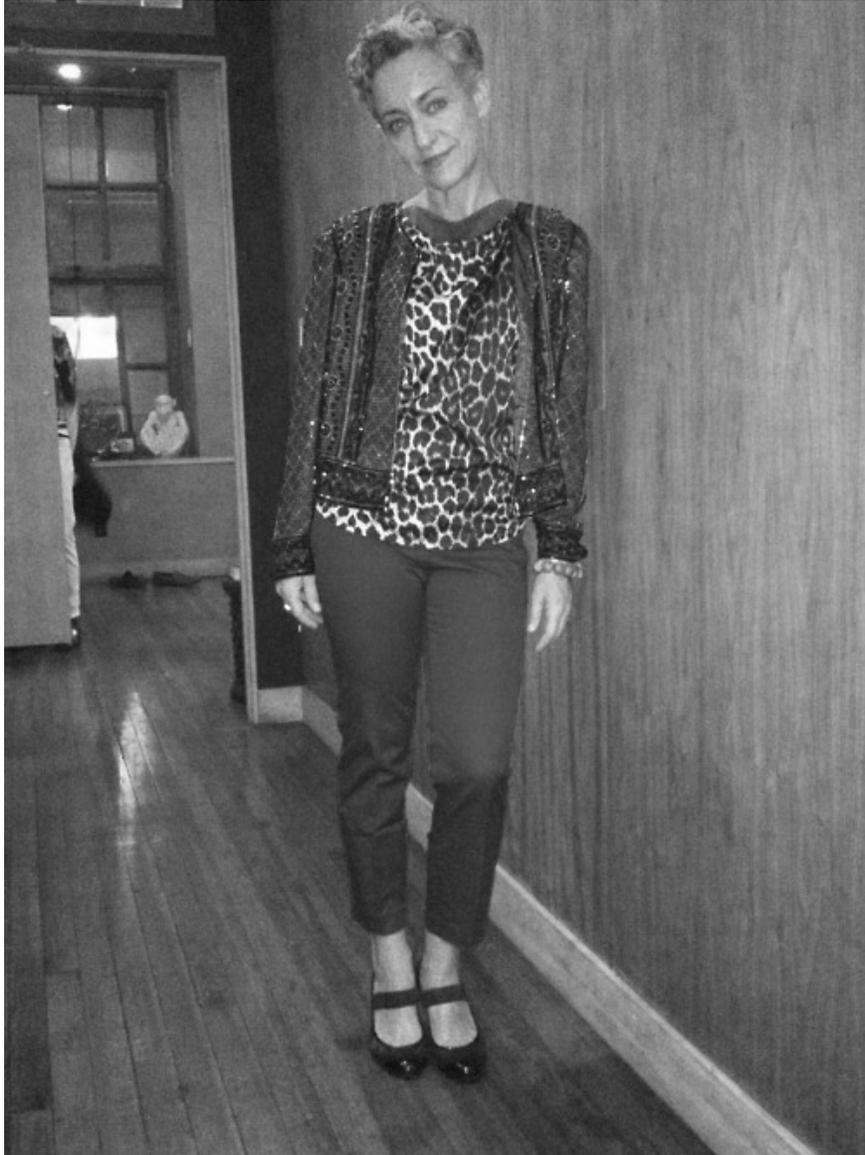
This is EXACTLY How I want to Dress Tomorrow Morning...

From Prada Mens Collection, Fall 2013



Your ShopperBag Blouse

Blouse with its own shoulder bag by Bless. Club Monaco pleated skirt (wardrobe staple since late 90's), A.P.C. orange patent T-straps (ditto)



Color Story

Off to an opening at MOMA. Greens and textures in **harmony**. Vintage beaded jacket from eBay, hand-me-down-from-a-friend leopard blouse, J. Crew capri pants, DKNY Mary-Jane's.

photo by Cassius!



Interpretations

Going out on Sunday night, one of the coldest of the year, I put together this outfit from clothes I have owned for years. Nothing new, but re-styled to try to interpret this feeling from the Spring 2012 Marc Jacobs main line. So old, as new and spring as winter, if you follow me. Isn't this how to play the game?

Flea market paillette covered sweater, Cynthia Steffe tiered skirt, Marc by Marc shoes



Great Dress, Bad Shots

I wore this amazing Carven dress I got off (where else...) eBay this summer to the Wade Guyton opening at the Whitney last week. Too bad the shots of it are so dark!

(Cassius looks so mature...)



Old Stuff

After all the posting about Pre-Fall and the fantasy wardrobes one might create, I end up doing what many do: shop the closet.

So I plan to post a series of looks featuring tired and true garments- things I have kept for years, things I am glad to have. It's not always about buy, buy, buy. Not at all.

Vintage YSL blouse from the 26th Street Flea (RIP) purchased around 2003. Grey full trousers purchased in 2000 at Fred Segal in LA.

Checklist

Blood Sugar, 2013

Video screened on vintage ski jacket, edition of 3, 1 AP

Dimensions variable

Untitled, 2013

Acrylic spray-paint on jute canvas

30 x 40 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie VidalCuglietta, Brussels

White Flag Library is an ancillary exhibition program of *White Flag Projects*.

This publication is illustrated by selections from the artist's blog, yourplasticbag.tumblr.com. The cover image is a self-portrait by the artist from 1982.

About the Artist

Cheryl Donegan has presented one-person exhibitions with White Columns, New York; Basilico Fine Arts, New York; and Galerie Vidal-Cuglietta, Brussels. Her work has been presented as part of numerous group exhibitions including *NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star*, New Museum, New York; *Beside, With, Against And Yet*, the Kitchen, New York; MoMA/PS 1, Long Island City; Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Biennale Lyon D'Art Contemporain, Lyon; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Donegan's work has been discussed in *Bomb*, *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Modern Painters*. She earned her MFA from Hunter College. Donegan lives and works in New York.

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