

JUNO DORAN interviewed by Giovanni Cervi for pigmagazine
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How come you decided to move from Portugal to Manchester?

Perhaps because I am a gypsy...? I lived in Angola when I was little and in New York was I was a teenager. But in 1992 I moved from Portugal to London because my family was already established there, and when I spent Christmas with them I really liked the city, so a month later I packed all my things and moved to London as well, with my boyfriend.

I lived in London for 5 years and had a very normal life with my very normal boyfriend, working as a photographer both for the media and as an artist photographer. When he left me in 1997 I felt broken and depressed. I went to Portugal for 3 months just to be with friends, to try to forget and find myself again, get drunk and idle. When I went back to London I felt that to become a full person I needed to get away from London and all the bad memories. So when I was given a photo assignment in Manchester I spent a day there and fell in love with the city, with the empty dark factories, the people and the atmosphere, and hoped that if I moved there I could start again, as me.

The truth is that my previous relationship had numbed me and fragmented me into two different people, on the surface I was a normal person, and underneath someone stranger and more artistic. I felt like I was waking up from being dead and I wanted to release that other side of me, feel more alive, and this was a good opportunity.

So I rented a Transit van, filled it up with all my stuff and drove the 330 kilometres from London up the motorway to Manchester, singing "Hit the North" by The Fall. The first few months in Manchester were horrible, I didn't know anyone and was too shy to make friends, and I was still recovering from what had happened. But slowly I made it my home, later I met my true love, Paul and got married to him last September, but [...] I have been feeling the north wind, and I'm probably moving to Bristol next summer, or somewhere else, far away from here, maybe... And the reason is that Manchester has changed a lot since I got here, the beautiful decaying factories are now apartments for rich businessmen, and Manchester has lost its authenticity.

You portray everyday life and everyday people...is it because you want to FEEL deeper what surrounds you? Or because you don't want to forget? Or what else?

I love everyday life and real things, real people, so in painting this I am paying homage to the beauty of life. I often find the simplest things beautiful, those things I think almost nobody notices. And simple things make me very happy. I am not impressed by glamour, appearance or material possessions, I think real life and authenticity are the keys to happiness and that's what I care most about.

Why did you choose that kind of hyper-realistic style?

Before I became a painter I was a photographer. I went everywhere with my camera and recorded everything. I worked as a photographer but I also used photography for art projects. I even recorded my family at every important event; I felt that without a camera it was like I had part of my body missing. The problem is that through the years I became an observer, and slowly I got stuck on the other side of everything, as if I was trapped in a glass box. Late 1998 my mother gave a big canvas that she found in her place of work, left by an artist who had worked there. I put the canvas in my living room against the wall, and every day I looked at it, as if I was preparing myself to dive into painting but was waiting for the right moment. In January 1999 I made the

change. I slowly abandoned photography as a final medium to start painting my photographs. The way I see it it's as if I was seeking redemption from photography. Because photography is so quick and requires so little physical involvement and I took so many thousands of pictures, I felt like I needed to "pay for my sins", to FEEL the image, to build it, one by one, slowly, to experience a slow physical involvement with my work. Each painting takes me between 1 and 3 months to make and I think I have achieved in this way that redemption, and closeness to what I do.

I realise that there was a photo-realist movement in the 1960's in the USA but my work is different, it comes from photography. It's as if I am still a photographer but instead of using photographic paper I use paint and canvas.

I also respect and admire other fields of visual arts like installation and video but at the moment I am only painting, which may in time change because I am interested in video and collaborations with electronic and ambient musicians.

How do you choose the characters of your works? Do you try to reveal the soul of the people (or of a situation) you paint? Or you just make a personal interpretation?

In *Black Paintings* I chose people who were real, who really looked and dressed like that, as a representation of individual choice against mainstream fashions and ideals, but it is me in each one of them, it is my own attitude, I am expressing myself through them.

In the project *forgetting Godot*, it's mostly me and my husband, Soup Face, and spaces we occupy, except for #5 (*the end of parties*) which is a friend of ours passed out on the floor after having drunk too much.

What does it mean being an artist?

I think that different artists would give you different answers, but the way I see it I think that being an artist is almost like being a prophet, someone who is willing to sacrifice oneself for creation, for vision, producing in their works inspirational and mind expanding results. Artists open doors to the other side, the non-real world, but they do it at the cost of their own safety and sanity. Many artists sacrifice themselves too much in terms of money and time. There is no such thing as a 9 to 5 artist; it's something that's always with you, even when you sleep. It feels like a mission that has to be accomplished at all costs. It's who you are more than what you do.

An ordinary day.... please, tell me what you do, from sunrise to sunset.

Iggy Pop said that "coffee & cigarettes are the breakfast of champions" so I guess I am a champion. But in the morning when we sit in the living room having that mighty "breakfast", my husband and I, we look more like Beavis and Butthead with a hangover.

We shower, get dressed, I spend a few minutes checking my e-mails, then he walks me to my studio which is just down the road.

Sometimes we meet at lunchtime and go somewhere for lunch.

I get in the studio, check my post, and open the windows to get some fresh air because the oil paint exhales a nasty smell overnight. Before I start painting I always spend about an hour writing, both in my journal and in a notebook. I put on some music, usually Beethoven or Gorecki, or Donnie Darko's soundtrack, or Bjork, Radiohead, Sigur Ros, Air, depends on how I feel. I only keep copied CD's in the studios because they can get stained with paint.

Then I put on my overalls and I start painting. I am addicted to coffee, chocolate and orange juice so I have lots of these in the studio, which I have once in a while.

Sometimes friends visit me, and they sit down for a while, I make some coffee and we talk.

Sometimes Soup (my husband) and I exchange text messages in our mobile phones, to keep in touch and let each other know what's going on. Our relationship is great, we are like children sharing secrets, we see things the same way and we love each other's company. On the way home we usually go to a corner shop owned by an Asian man we call Sam and I buy tobacco and he buys a can or two of Guinness.

We arrive home and chill out for a while, I have a coffee, and he has his Guinness. Then he spends a few hours practising piano and working on his music, whilst I do some paperwork or read.

If we stay home, he usually makes dinner and I wash the dishes, but often we go out for dinner, alone or with friends, or go to the cinema. Sometimes he picks me up at the studio and we go out without any plans, we just wonder and take what comes.

We go to bed around 1 am.

Our social life in Manchester is quiet, often we feel like we are hermits in a city, living in our own bubble, and this is because most of our best friends and family live far away, and every chance we get we travel to visit them in London, Portugal, Sweden or the USA.

It seems you love darkness more than light, why?

There is more depth in darkness, more to the imagination. There are more possibilities. Like a Rembrandt painting, or film noir, darkness wraps everything in mystery. There can also be darkness in something light if we are talking about something that is obscure and strange, like for example the film *Donnie Darko* I thought was a 'dark' film, (But please don't classify me as "gothic" I really would not like that, and so many people have made that mistake) or a David Lynch film.

The music factor: references to music in your paintings and, in general, it seems that music is important for your "creative action" (and when someone watch your works).... is it true?

With *Black Paintings* the reference to music was initially important. I started this project in 1999 when the alternative youth subcultures were strong, embracing bands like Marilyn Manson and Nine Inch Nails.

I portrayed people from this subculture because they were a response against the mainstream, against the pressures of society on the individual to become like everyone else, therefore expressing their own individuality in how they looked and lived.

However, in the last few years since, the appearance and dress codes of this subculture have been taken into mainstream culture, and it has become fashion.

Because of this change I have abandoned musical references in my work. Currently, especially with the project *forgetting Godot*, I'd like to think that the major influences are real life, real moments, backed up by literary references, mostly from writers and philosophers like Samuel Beckett, Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, and films like *Buffalo 66*, *Mallrats*, *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas*, and Jim Jarmusch films.

What is the best soundtrack for watching your paintings?

Artist: Aphex Twin / Album: *Drukqs* / Song: gwety mernans

Artist: John Wisely / Song: Wandruska (unreleased)

What is immortal?

A kiss that never happened.

Who are your heroes?

Paul (my husband), Samuel Beckett, Jim Jarmusch, Vincent Van Gogh, Beethoven, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Rimbaud, Jeanne Moreau, Shirin Neshat, Bill Viola and Caravaggio. Great people, one day I will steal their souls. And when I die Paul and Samuel Beckett will be my lovers in the sky, and everyone else will join us for drinks.

What is love?

A secret shared at 5 am in the summer, under the blue light of dawn.