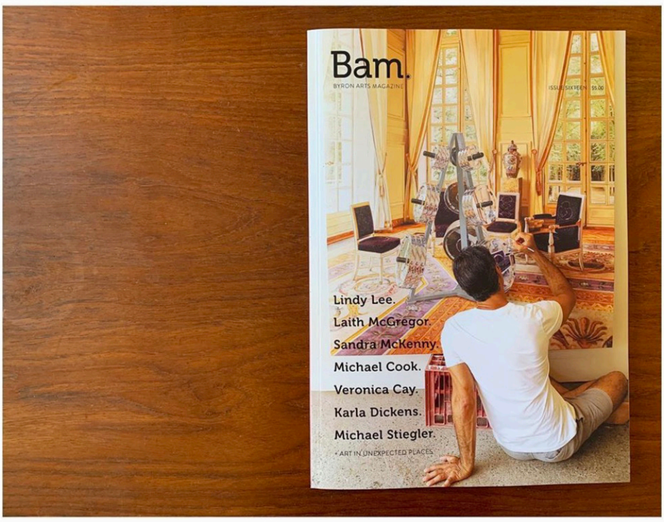
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Michael Stiegler.
Interview by Poppy Richard
EMERGING AUSTRALIAN ARTIST, DESIGNER AND PHOTOGRAPHER MICHAEL STIEGLER HAS MOVED IN SYDNEY AND NEW YORK, COLLABORATING WITH THE LIKES OF THE BEGINNING LIBERTY, MISS BALL, THE KILLINGTON DOWN HANGS. HIS FRENETIC PAINTING, ILLUSTRATION AND PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPLEMENT HIS EDGY PHOTOGRAPHIC STYLE. IN 2011, MICHAEL DECIDED TO TRY HIS HAND AT DRAWING. HE HAD JUST MOVED TO NEW YORK AND WAS STRUGGLING TO CONTINUE HIS START-UP FASHION LABEL, DESPITE HAVING THE LIKES OF KATE MOSS AND CHRISSY TEIGEN WEARING IT.
MICHAEL BEGAN WORKING IN A RETAIL STORE IN SOHO TO PAY THE BILLS. WHILE WORKING, HE BEGAN DRAWING THE FACES HE SAW BEFORE WALQUITE. HIS CHARACTERS WERE INSPIRED BY THE PEOPLE AND FACES HE WOULD SEE ON HIS WAY TO AND FROM WORK, WALKING FROM SOHO DOWN THE BOWERY, TO HIS FLAT ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE.

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Poppy How did your art career begin?
Michael Growing up, I was really into art, and I grew in Australia, if you want to pursue art, you have to go to university. I didn't have the grades to go to university. (Laughs) Which I think is really funny. All the people I hated at school, I had to go spend years of exploration of who I am. I'm not dyslexic and wasn't strong at spelling or writing. If I'm doing art, I'm doing art. I'm not doing art to be a writer. You should judge me on my work, not my writing skills. So that's why I chose to go to TAFE to study fashion design, I was always into creating art, design and fashion. I've got a lot of ideas and making things. It was more hands-on, which I was hyperactive. I did fashion for quite some time, then I moved to New York because I realised that with too much paperwork needed. I stopped doing fashion and I went to the street art and contemporary art in the city. That's where I've been in Australia was very favourable for all identities. At that time, I was living in the Bowery in New York City. I started drawing these figurative characters, inspired by the people I saw on the streets.
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Poppy Can you explain what friends on Bowery are? They seem to be a recurring presence in your work.
Michael When I was living in New York, I lived and worked on The Bowery, which is a street in downtown Manhattan. There is a lot of homelessness and crackheads, displaced people. I started drawing what they might look like or feel inside, in a figurative way. So I started drawing hundreds of these body movements, shapes, this and that. I've never drawn the same body or face twice. I've drawn thousands of them now. I was still into my fashion magazines, especially Purple Magazine, which has art and fashion. I am still influenced heavily by fashion. And also, observing fashion editorials, the way they're posed, the way they're dressed, the way they're styled, their legs and their arms. So I took that and it's influenced my drawings and illustrations and evolved into these characters, with their placements and poses. As I was going through the magazines, I was thinking that a lot of people, such as models, well-off people, or people who look good, might feel differently on the inside. They might be depressed, or lonely, or might be sad, but on the outside they look like they're amazing. So on the inside they might look like these characters. So I interpreted this as collaged mixed media to show that people have different personalities and different emotions. It with these figurative, monster-ish characters. And when I started doing them, a lot of people started to relate. It kind of took its own little path. That's one style I'm really proud of. It's unique.
Poppy Please tell us about On Bowery, your recent exhibition in Byron Bay at Lone Goat Gallery.
Michael When I came back to Australia, I met Andy from Lone Goat Gallery. He loved my work and I was offered the space to exhibit. All my works were still on sea freight coming back from New York, and the show was within five weeks. So I had to create all new work for the show. I wanted to create a capsule of works – not one particular style. Ink drawings, collages, prints, paintings, silkscreens. I titled it On Bowery because of the works were inspired by being around there. Large silkscreen prints inspired by Andy Warhol, using some iconic images that I took myself. And large scale mixed media, printing on canvas and paper works.
Poppy What is the story behind your photograph of Kate Moss, in she is featured on the silkscreen prints?
Michael When I was asked to do the show, I thought straight away I could use this image that I took of Kate Moss in Byron Bay when she was out touring with The Kills. At that time I was making clothes, so that's how we met, through fashion. These images were taken in Byron Bay, so I thought it would be kind of a cool ne re – bringing it back to Byron Bay, with all my styles and what I was creating in New York. As iconic image taken in Byron Bay and using an Andy Warhol process to produce my work. I wanted to replicate what Andy Warhol would do if he were still alive.
Poppy When I have seen you create your art, it seems you go into a particular zone, a state of absorption ...
Michael I guess I start with a slight idea of what I ought be doing. I'm no super star, so if I want to inject my pizzaz / colour / or whatever. Once my hand hits the paper, it's like I disconnect from everything else, and I don't even think about what I'm doing. It's just my hand. And it flows by itself and I don't notice, in a way, what is happening or what I'm doing. And then I look at my look, every time and then, and I'm a bit like, Wow, I did that, because I don't think about what I'm doing or what I may look, and have that outside perspective of what's in front of me. When I'm in the motion of doing it, there is no real form or direction, it's just what comes out. I don't really plan the outcome of it.
Poppy Do you think that it's important for emerging artists to have people around them that believe in their art?
Michael I think the first thing you have to do is believe in yourself and to stick to it. Because the first couple of shows I had didn't convert to sales. I stuck with it, and it grew traction, and it grows and grows. Support is definitely needed. It's like a business, I guess.
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