

KuBus 61

Jim Avignon – The fastest painter in the world

00'11" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"Hi! My name is Jim Avignon and they call me the fastest painter in the world. Over the next few minutes I'll try to persuade you that I am."

00'35"

Speed plays the central role in Jim Avignon's art. A fast tempo is necessary to keep up with the high demand for his pictures. But speed also belongs to his self image. His paintings find their place mainly outside of Galleries and Museums, they do not seek an elitist role, rather his art finds its place back in middle of ordinary life where it started.

00'58" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"I came up with the idea of this slogan – the fastest painter in the world – simply because anyone allowing a short time for painting a picture was seen in a negative light. I could then say here's something entirely different, it's got nothing to do with anything that's been done up until now."

01'25" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"Any coherent idea can be painted within 10 minutes, but a proper picture, for one that you can put in a frame I would spend two hours to two days working on."

01'40"

Jim Avignon has lived and painted in Berlin for more than 15 years.

Behind his pseudonym lies Germany's most productive painter. In his pictures he focuses on reality. His themes are the large and small catastrophes of daily life in an age of mass media and global conflicts.

There is a sharp contradiction in his work that appears naive and brightly coloured. Avignon incorporates criticism in what appears to be just decoration.

02'12" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"In all of my work there is a sense of impending disaster but I find that brief second which is more like a laugh in the face of terror."

02'33"

Jim Avignon became known in the 90's on the periphery of the Techno movement. He provided the decoration for countless parties and clubs. Always on the move, always busy, he has held exhibitions in almost every town in Germany. And time and again in towns which up until then that had no association with art.

03'00" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"I more or less became a painter by accident. For a long time I thought I would take up another occupation. For example, looking after the aged was a pleasing prospect."

03'16"

Kassel 1992 – everyone in the art scene that had a name or reputation was gathered here at the Documenta. Everyday, Avignon painted a picture and then destroyed it at the end of the day. Behind the fairground performance lurked a grim protest over official artistic activities in which works of art are elevated by the art critics and then exploited by the art dealers. This spectacular action quickly made him well known.

03'53" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"Basically, as a painter, I am in the same position today, rushing from week to week to the next plan, and sliding from one experience to the other and in the process setting up a fair number of exhibitions in a fair number of countries."

04'25"

In reality Jim Avignon is active not just as a painter – he is multitalented and also enjoys success as a musician with his one-man band, Neoangin.

04'37" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"The artificial creation, Jim Avignon, has, ultimately, the character of art work-in-progress, and with the best will in the world I never thought that 15 to 20 years after I devised the name I would still be identified with it. There was never a master plan as to what this figure should be. All I knew is that I was not at all happy with my own personality and that's why I came up with this garish pseudonym, and I've been able to live an entirely different sort of life with this name."

05'23" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"Much of my material is what I find lying about, if I pass by a cardboard box I could easily pick it up and take it with me. Sometimes I intentionally work with a sort of low cost aesthetic, like packing paper, binding tape. And almost every time I have a big project I see if I can find the cheapest way to do it and choose the necessary methods to use."

05'54" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"And it really happens that ideas just occur, just the way snow flakes do, you don't have to prepare them, they are just there.

Travelling by train or by the Underground or even crossing a road, I suddenly get an idea and I write it down. Depending on what I have on me, ball point pen, pencil, felt pen, I make a note of it in my sketchbook. And then sometimes when I have an exhibition to prepare, I flip through the book and think, yes, I could make a picture out of that."

06'36" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"Perhaps you can have 50 to a hundred ideas a year, no more than that. It also happens that I may paint a picture a lot of times, for one thing because I think the theme is so good and it would be a pity just to show it, say, in Finland, and I could just as well show it in France or in Berlin. Another reason is I may think, Oh God, I need 15 pictures and I've only got 12, what others can I paint."

07'16" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"I have my own family of elements. Occasionally I add a new one, figures or symbols and elements that I think I would really like to represent and combine anew in a picture."

07'36"

Avignon's painting has not stood still. The computer has made an inroad as have photographic elements and montage techniques. His themes, though, he still finds in the middle of daily life.

07'49" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"When I paint a picture it is pretty well decided on before I even start. That means that the painting approach is purely functional. Sometimes a colour or a brush stroke may be changed or altered but I am not the sort of painter who works at the canvas with a wrinkled brow struggling to find my inner thoughts."

08'14"

Instead he finds his themes in the reality that surrounds him. Avignon is a keen observer, he travels a lot and collects a lot of ideas in the process which, with completely surprising results and applications, finish up reappearing in his pictures.

08'34" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"I see myself in the first instance as a recorder of or a commentator on the times in which we live, as some one who can reflect in stark and simple terms on what happens to us or to present it in a different way,"

09'07"

Much as Jim Avignon criticises and sees through the fixed rules and attitudes of self-admiration in the art world, he has no intention of turning his back on it. So, off to the Art Fair in Cologne.

09'21" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"My little capitalistic enterprise is the art fair."

09'28" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"I try hard not to follow a couple of very strict but unwritten rules of the art world. One of these rules is that when one has sold a picture for a certain price he should not sell anything else cheaper. Other principles are increasing the price by reducing the number of works on offer and the other is increasing the price by using costly materials; I completely ignore that."

09'52"

Even when he knows the rules of the game and can play them with virtuosity, a quick look at the reality of the situation makes it clear where he comes from and where he belongs.

10'04" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"I don't really have anything against art fairs but they are not for me. I always produce more than is good for the market, that means I turn out a high number of pictures and I always sell them for prices that cause a belly ache for a certain part of the art market."

10'29" Original sound, Christel Schüppenhauer, Gallery owner

"The art market naturally rejects that for you can make no money that way. You just can't put something down and say that's worth a hundred thousand. He is simply an action artist, but more than that he is a musician, he makes pictures, objects and actions and that's why if I have to put him pigeon hole him I would say he is part of the Post Fluxus generation."

10'49" Conversation between Gallery owner and customer

G.: "There's a red dot."

K.: "It's mine. Belongs to me."

G.: "Yes."

K.: "As does the picture now."

G.: "You can be proud of that."

11'14"

Paris – Avignon is on the move again.

He is much happier in the Arts Factory in Montmartre than he is in a gallery. Here art that is accessible and available for the man in the street is displayed and sold. The opening takes place tomorrow and Avignon would not be Avignon if everything was ready. Especially with titles, he waits until the last minute.

11'38" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"A good title is the beginning and end of a picture and as I am always hoping to find a better title I wait until the last minute to write it out."

11'59"

At an exhibition Jim Avignon sells more than pictures and CD's. The most important of the pictures he has painted in past years are collected in book form.

12'09" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"The books that I publish in a loose series are a bit like diaries for me – basically when I have worked at something it is more important to photograph it and put it out as a book than to keep the original."

12'28"

Jim Avignon is very consistent in his policy of making art affordable and available for everyone. That's why he's always on the look out for people who share the same outlook.

12'37" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"Just as it always has, highly valued art has always been produced for Galleries and Museum, but I reckon, and it's all the same whether I am in Singapore or Russia, or in France or Finland, there are always people turning up who have been waiting for some one who works like me to come along. There's a good possibility that over the next ten years a lot of amazing people will turn up and really make a change – or then again, perhaps there won't."

13'07" Original sound, Jim Avignon

"And that's it. Ciao."

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