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ASSASSINATION: Alexis Granwell, Artist Represented by Tiger Strikes Asteroid

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3/30/2009

Salt Lake City Fine Arts Examiner: ASS...

The third hit interview turned out to be a rather fascinating view into a different art scene of Philadelphia, a venue that has been considered to be an alternative to the high-powered New York one.

As a short disclosure, I used to live in Philadelphia right before I moved out here to Salt Lake City. This was about four to five years ago and I was working as a documentary photographer (under a different name) then. Do I regret having moved out here? Not really considering that my studio and living expenses are much less substantially in Salt Lake City. However, with the proliferation of wonderful galleries like the [F.U.E.L. Collection](#), [Projects Gallery](#), [Tiger Strikes Asteroid](#), and so on, I sometimes feel slightly jealous of having left the Philadelphia area (although the crime and homicide I don't miss too much as I was nearly mugged and killed near Tasker Street back in the day) years ago.



Portrait of Alexis Granwell. Courtesy of Facebook and Alexis Granwell.

Apart from the rambling about my old stomping grounds, this is the proper time to introduce an upcoming, cutting-edge artist named [Alexis Granwell](#) whose installations are rather innovative, proving her as a successor to [Eva Hesse](#) and [Jessica Stockholder](#). I first saw Granwell's work in the publication [New American Paintings](#) last year and was struck by its utter bravado and profound spiritual medium. By combining



Ecstasy, 2007, foam, wood, wire, fabric, and latex paint, 170 by 170 by 10 inches. Courtesy of culturehall.

her ideas about how painting can be reinvented onto new supports such as foam, she proves herself worthy of invitation to the [Whitney Biennial](#).

Peep and respect her work. She is going to be where we are going to be in five to ten years. For more information about her artwork or background, please check out her website at <http://www.alexisgranwell.com/> and if you wish to procure her pieces, please contact Tiger Strikes Asteroid at TigerStrikesAsteroid@gmail.com.

So here are the details of this late night hit by THE ART ASSASSIN, a rendezvous straight from the pages of a [John Le Carre](#) book.

qi peng: What is the origin of the newly formed artist-run cooperative Tiger Strikes Asteroid? Why such as poetic and Dada-sounding name for the gallery? What the other artists in the cooperative like?

Alexis Granwell: I must give a huge thanks to [Alex Paik](#). He is the idea man. A couple months ago Alex sent out an email looking for members to help him start this collective space. As soon as I heard, I jumped right on the bandwagon. The whole project came together really fast. I am so thrilled to be a part of this gallery. I

Gallery

- ASSASSINATION: James Wagner, Art Critic, Collector, and Editor of ArtCat
- ASSASSINATION: Jason Robert Bell, Artist Represented by Thomas Robertello Gallery

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have been frustrated with the lack of contemporary art spaces in Philly. While there is a burgeoning art scene here, there needs to be more happening in this city. I know so many talented artists in Philadelphia who never have the opportunity to show their work. We hope to broaden the scene with new local artists. In addition, we plan to show artists from New York, LA and Chicago.

The name "Tiger Strikes Asteroid" was created on a whim. We were trying to conjure up an image of something explosive to contrast with the small scale of the space. I know it is a bit long but I think it works.

All of our art is very different. My installations and works on paper deal with the metaphysical. Alex Paik is inspired by pop colors and videogames. [Caroline Santa](#) draws brightly colored creatures to diagram systems of communication. [Phillip Adams](#) renders charcoal portraits of individuals with anonymous backgrounds (the newest images are taken from [Google](#)). [Timothy Gierschick](#) paints minimalist symbols on collaged panels. [Nathan Pankratz](#) works with collage mixed media and paint to create layered and tactile imagery evoking images of maps or advertisements.

qi peng: How will your experience at Tiger Strikes Asteroid differ from exhibiting at a commercial gallery space? What do you enjoy about the thriving contemporary Philadelphia arts scene as compared to the hypercommercial New York scene? Is there more experimentation in the area?

Alexis Granwell: I think the main difference between running a collective and showing at a commercial gallery is that you are in control of the art in that space. Our goal is not to make money off the work. We are solely focused on showing the best and most interesting work possible.

The greatest part about living in Philadelphia is that it is cheap.....and I say this sincerely. We decided one day that we were going to start this gallery and two months later we rented the space. In Philadelphia, there are plenty of run down warehouses just waiting to be converted into art studios, galleries or music spaces. Everything here is very [DIY](#) and if you are proactive you can make things happen. I don't think that this scenario would be as easy in New York or LA.

I would say that Philly's contemporary art scene would compare to what is currently happening in [Bushwick](#). I am not sure if there is more experimentation happening here. Each city seems to take on its own aesthetic though and I hope to shake that up a bit.

qi peng: I first saw your fabulous installation paintings and works on paper through the curated journal [New American Paintings](#). How has the exposure through the magazine boosted your career? Would you recommend this or any other juried competition for emerging artists who are in art school, etc.?

Alexis Granwell: NAP did give me some exposure. It is a well-produced publication and [Janelle Porter](#) did a good job selecting artists. It is beneficial to apply to juried shows when you are first starting out. I think it is good to be choosy though. Apply to shows with established curators. Sometimes one show can lead to another if the curator connects with the work. Artist registries are another great way to gain exposure.

qi peng: What is your studio practice? How do you gather the materials that you use for the sculptures? How do you fashion the final pieces from the ingredients that you discover like an archaeologist? Do you consider yourself a process-oriented conceptual artist?

Alexis Granwell: My practice often begins with a text. I am usually inspired by a passage in a book. Often, the idea that intrigues me is something that is not physically manifested in the world. I try to find a way to diagram, map or structure the idea. Most of the text is based on psychology or philosophy.

Many of my materials are gathered on the street by my studio; old branches, foam packaging, broken furniture etc. This detritus is either cast in paper, wrapped in pulp or painted. I keep boxes of these fragments and categorize the pieces. Once I begin working on a sculpture, I can pull out the fragment I need and begin to collage. I come from a painting background and I guess I organize my forms as painter might organize colors on a palette. The process begins with a specific idea but is heavily material oriented. I try to remain as open as possible when working.

qi peng: Who are your strongest artistic and/or cultural influences? Do you have any music, artists, books, movies, etc. that you wish to recommend to your fans here? How do your hobbies and interest manifest themselves into your pieces?

Alexis Granwell: I am really influenced by the [Arte Povera](#) movement as well as female sculptors of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Some of my favorite artists are [Charles Simmonds](#), [Rachel Whiteread](#), [Alan Saret](#), [Eva Hesse](#), [Lee Bontecou](#) and [Cy Twombly](#). I spend a lot of time listening to music. I feel particularly inspired by the lyrics of [Will Oldham](#) who often combines the abject with the beautiful. As for books, I have a whole pile by my bed that I am trying to read. One of my favorite books is "Night Studio" written by [Phillip Guston's](#) daughter. I also just finished "[Poetics of Space](#)" which I would recommend.

qi peng: What are some your favorite galleries and/or memorable exhibits that you have experienced recently? Do you have any favorite art magazines, columns, or blogs that you wish to recommend to the readers?

Alexis Granwell: [Louise Bougeouis](#) at the [Guggenheim](#) was an incredible retrospective. That might be the best show that I have seen in the last couple months. My favorite art space in Philly is [The Fabric Workshop](#). They have a wonderful permanent collection and they bring in top international and emerging artists. In New York, I like [Tanya Bonakdar](#), [Sikkema Jenkins](#) and [James Cohan Gallery](#). There are so many blogs I have been reading lately but [Modern Art Notes](#) is a good one. I also want to mention that [Ed Winkelman](#) has a great article on galleries and representation. Definitely worth checking out.

qi peng: Your sculptures give an illusion of fragility on the surface but an inner strength holding it all together. What concept is behind this or am I way off base?

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Alexis Granwell: I would say that is a perceptive comment. In my work, I use a vocabulary of abstract forms to explore the complex structures of psychological states. Some of the new work deals with diagrams that depict how the body and mind relate to the state of emptiness. I want these pieces to be seen as still occurring: forms fall apart, forms are rebuilt.

qi peng: Do you consider yourself a feminist? How do you place your artwork within the context of general art history? What is your opinion about female artists and the way that they interact together?

Alexis Granwell: I consider myself to be a feminist but my work is not about making any kind of feminist statement. I would say my sculptural work is related to early assemblage and late 1960s formless sculpture. My works on paper seem more related to process art.

qi peng: What advice can you provide for emerging or student artists as they graduate from school? What are some potential pitfalls of having to deal with the gallery system? Any pluses or minuses of having to deal with gallery owners?

Alexis Granwell: I would advise students to make sure that they maintain a community once they leave school. Start a monthly crit group. It is important to continue the dialogue once you leave school. Also, try to find a job that can feed your work in some way. Or, at the very least, find a job that gives you enough time to work in the studio.

I have been fortunate enough to have good experiences working with gallery owners. Getting involved with a gallery before you are ready to show your work is a potential pitfall. It also seems difficult to research and find a gallery that truly is the right match for your work.

qi peng: What accounts for the proliferation of artist collectives within the Philadelphia area such as [Vox Populi](#), [Muse Gallery](#), [Inliquid](#), Tiger Strikes Asteroid, etc.? Is there a strong interaction between artists, collectors, galleries, and the overall public in the city?

Alexis Granwell: Collectives and non-profits do better in Philadelphia because they do not depend on sales to remain open. There is just not the same kind of art market here as there is in New York. I would say that there is a good interaction between artists and galleries. Most of the galleries participate in "First Fridays" which are citywide monthly openings that usually have a successful turnout. I think the combination of artists, galleries and art collectors becomes a bit of a grey area. I am not sure that I could accurately answer that question.

qi peng: Any hidden treasures at the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#) that you wish to give props to? Does its presence influence how you do your artwork?

Alexis Granwell: The PMA has a solid collection. My favorite room is the Cy Twombly room "The Battle of Iliam"

qi peng: Do you have any cool stories that you wish to share from your art school days at the [University of Pennsylvania](#)? What are some of the challenges that you had to face during that time?

Alexis Granwell: [Dave Hickey](#) caused quite a ruckus when he came as the visiting critic. He basically insulted everyone and forced the secretary to continually buy him venti [vanilla mocha lattes](#). He seemed to be having a lot of fun.

I might be part of a small population when I say this, but I though grad school was completely awesome. There was constant dialogue with faculty and students, an amazing library, facilities to produce anything imaginable and most importantly TIME. I think the realizations and breakthroughs I had in school were due to the fact that I could sit in my studio all day and work. It is more difficult to get that consistent time now.

The biggest challenge in grad school was that sometime there were too many voices in the studio. I am perhaps still grappling with that.

qi peng: What are some challenges that artists are going to be facing during this time of economic recession? Does the dampened mood influence your artistic concerns and methods?

Alexis Granwell: I have seen a lot of artists lose gallery jobs or teaching jobs. It is hard to financially stay afloat right now. For me, I have not had the experience of living off my art and so not too much has changed. It is disheartening to see so many galleries closing in New York. But, my hope is that people will just have to become more creative in how or where they show their work. It could also be a positive change to have the art scene less saturated with commercial work. Perhaps the mood of the recession has subconsciously helped me choose more humble materials but I would say it is not part of the text that I am working with right now.

qi peng: How does your works on paper relate to your sculpture from a philosophical stance? From a visual stance?

Alexis Granwell: Visually the 2-D and 3-D works feed each other. Both hold the same sort of tension and language. I like how when I am investigating the language with one medium it will completely inform another medium even when the processes are so different. Each medium seems to bring a new perspective to the problem I am trying to solve.

For more gossip or dishing me the art scoop: Email me at qipengart@gmail.com

Selection of Alexis Granwell's Sculptures and Works on Paper



This is an online selection of Alexis Granwell's work. She is represented by Tiger Strikes Asteroid and lives in Philadelphia. The sculptures and drawings are copyright by Alexis Granwell and all rights reserved.

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