



Jayson Musson Hyperallergic May 2012

MTV Sucks and Other Thoughtz from an Art Micro-celebrity

By Robert Cicetti, Hyperallergic
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Jayson Musson in conversation with Josh Kline of EAI on Tuesday night (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Jayson Musson aka Hennessy Youngman aka Mr. AKA's might proclaim himself to be many things (including Mitt Romney's drug dealer), but Tuesday night at Electronic Arts Intermix's (EAI) screening of his web series Art Thoughtz, Musson seemed reluctant to embrace his identity as an art world celebrity. He pointed to the fact that in total, his videos had only received under one million views, which is nothing special in comparison with other YouTube video stars and rather small compared to the truly huge video acts.

And yet, despite his relative insignificance on the world wide web, there he was, in front of a live audience, accepting institutional recognition and an offer to preserve his work in perpetuity offline. (Art Thoughtz is now available through EAI's distribution service as a hard copy, and an archival purchase of Musson's best videos, "How to Make Art," "On Beauty" or "Relational Aesthetics," costs around \$1,000.) Though he started Art Thoughtz on a whim and with nothing more than a webcam, Musson is now more than just a dude on YouTube; he is a prominent voice of the art world on the internet, an embodiment of the changing parameters for success. Although he claims to have no long-term plans, so far he's been able to parlay his achievements online into ones IRL: a recent curatorial project for Maurizio Cattelan's Family Business gallery, an upcoming show at a New York gallery and a children's book to be finished by the end of the month.



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Musson's real-life humility seems perfectly incongruous with his alter ego's self-aggrandizing persona. Whereas Hennessy Youngman has no qualms about addressing "the internet" at large, Musson seems aware that his reach is actually quite limited. While at first *Art Thoughtz* might come off as an attempt to make obscure art world ideologies approachable, Musson made it clear while speaking Tuesday night that he didn't intend for the series to be some sort of populist project. For one, he originally made the videos to be seen in a gallery context, and he doesn't think the YouTube platform matters, including its comment system (something Will Brand pondered in his write-up on Musson's EAI inclusion). Musson might care less about his notoriety on the internet given that his primary goal is to be taken seriously as a painter, but his web success has certainly opened doors, and I don't think he should shy away from claiming to have contributed to a cultural discourse that reaches beyond the art world proper.



Watching "Art Thoughtz" at EAI

The most interesting part of Musson's shtick is that his critique of MFA-level art world dialogue also serves to highlight the dearth of high-minded content on YouTube and other web video sites. I see Hennessy Youngman as a jester of two courts: the art world, of course, which takes itself too seriously and where laughter is much needed; and web culture, a realm that has become incalculably important, but also known for tomfoolery that rarely demands the intellectual effort often required by fine art. Musson seems to play with the notion that a YouTube video, let alone a meme image, could function as a work of art. He mocks the impossibility of finding (on the internet) some deep insight into the human condition or anything close to the sublime as described by Hennessy Youngman: "The incalculable immensity that will allow me to grasp the finite nature of my own being, y'know what I'm saying?"

With this in mind, I felt the need to ask Musson a very stupid question: Would you rather have an art-related show on MTV or a solo exhibition at MoMA? "MoMA?!" he retorted, implying that I'd hardly suggested an alternative to the mainstream. So instead I offered the permanent collection at the Met. Musson responded by saying that MTV sucked, and proceeded to discuss the pitfalls of pop culture celebrity, which was encouraging to hear. His idea of "real world" success is finding a place where Jayson, not Hennessy, can make it. And though I wouldn't mind watching Hennessy Youngman host a *Yo! MTV Raps* edition of *Art Thoughtz*, I bet finding a piece by Jayson Musson in a corner of the Met would be better than a double rainbow.