

CASSIDY TONER.

INTERVIEW

Interviewed by AMBER MOSS · Portrait by DIANA PFAMMATTER

What is it that first attracted you to the Visual Arts? How much did art play a part in your childhood?

I'm not exactly sure what first attracted me to art. I was always drawing and doing all sorts of strange things like covering the front of my dad's car in ketchup and wrapping it in police tape. But art wasn't a part of my childhood. My mother does something with computers—honestly, I'm still not sure what—and my father was a janitor. Presently, I'm able to look at a lot of the things that surrounded me as a child as artistic ways of thinking, but they were certainly never presented to me that way.

Albeit early in your career, you have proven experienced in several mediums that can express a string of complexities. Which do you feel most confident working with at this point?
Most often I work in a way where the idea dictates the medium. So it all depends on the project. I guess I feel most comfortable with ideas.

Would you describe your piece “Wile E. Coyote Regrets Killing the Road Runner”? What does it speak to and what is your relationship and attraction to cartoons?

It's a small ceramic sculpture roughly modeled after Michelangelo's “Pietà.” Instead of Mary holding Jesus, Wile E. Coyote is holding a limp Road Runner in his arms. The cartoon character Wile E. Coyote is actually based on a passage from the Mark Twain book “Roughing It.” He describes the American coyote as “a living, breathing allegory of want. He is always hungry.” So all of these sculptures focus on Wile E. spiraling out of control once he has gotten the only thing he ever wanted which was to eat the Road Runner. He's trying to come to terms with the fact that this is bringing him no satisfaction.

In regards to “Wile E. Coyote Wonders What Keeps Him Going,” what is the connection between the coyote and Camus's “The Myth of Sisyphus”?



Wile E. Coyote's plight is the same as Sisyphus's. They're both destined to repeat the same task over and over to no relief. Camus says, “I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too, concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself, forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.



Wile E. Coyote Feels the Pangs of Conscience. (How Do You Feel about Your Identity Being so Easily Reduced to this Caricature?). 2019. Spray-paint on clay, 49 x 17 x 20 cm © Cassidy Toner. Courtesy of GALERIE PHILIPPZOLLINGER, Zurich.

Wile E. Coyote Realizes He Is not as Steadfast as Saint Anthony in the Face of His Demons, 2019 (Unstable 4th Wall).
Spray-paint on clay, 52 x 23 x 10 cm © Cassidy Toner. Courtesy of GALERIE PHILIPPZOLLINGER, Zurich.



Group exhibition "RESET," at Kai Matsumiya Gallery, New York.



One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

In your self scaffolding piece, you include a family picture. Why did you choose to do so and how does the concept of family factor into your work?

This sculpture is a play on the words “scaffolding” and “support.” It’s meant to signify, in some way, all the things that make up my support system. The sculpture also includes Prozac and good luck charms. It could be viewed as all the things I have that are keeping me together, for good or bad. Even the weakest pillar is part of the foundation.

You use the word “trigger” in describing some of your work, with as well a few literal references such as in “Self-Destructive Work.” What would you define as that which triggers us and what does that process look like?

I’m using the word “triggered” in a rather literal sense, not the current slang. As in: “The motion sensor is triggered by the spectators’ presence.” The series, “Self-Destructive Work,” is a watercolor painting of a memento mori, coated with gunpowder and attached to a countdown clock. When the countdown clock reaches zero—each year on my birthday—an electrical current is sent from a battery to a match which in turn ignites the gunpowder and causes the work to burn.

What is your relation to obsessive compulsion, goal fulfillment, and self-destruction?

Ha, ha. I’m pretty obsessed with my own downfall. Like, if your goal is to fail and you fail, have you failed? Yes and no.

As one well-studied, detail what emphasis higher education plays in the life of an artist who seeks this and how it may provide assistance in navigating art as industry.

My perspective is skewed since I fell into the trap of higher education—I have a fucking Master’s in Fine Arts. I personally enjoy messing with the system I’ve willingly thrown myself into, but I’m more envious of those who’ve had the willpower to abstain from it. There’s no map for navigating an art career. The worst choice for me may be the best choice for someone else.

In “Loophole Hunters” and “Ways of Faking Your Life and Death,” your work involves the use of essays. What general connection do you feel your work plays in stimulating the trigger of connection manifested by the word?

I enjoy writing about my work and attempting to solidify my thoughts into language. These texts function, to me, as mind-maps so someone could see my zig-zagging line of thought.

How do you want the viewer to walk away feeling after spending time with your work?

I like my work to function on multiple levels. For me, I enjoy inviting people in with humor or absurdity. If the viewer takes the time to contemplate further, other doors to the work may open. For example, a work I have called “Reclining Figure” is an alabaster carving of a reclining female figure. Once a day, at an

unspecified time, I come into the gallery where I trip and fall over it. At first glance, this is a bit of a Buster Keaton slapstick antics. But upon further contemplation, someone might understand the idea about a young artist grappling with art history.

In the future, how would you like to see the progression of your career take form?

I guess I should be represented by DZ (David Zwirner) or Gago (Gagosian) and be on all of the “30 under 30” lists and participate in some biennials and be in some museums and Artforum’s “Scene and ‘Herd” section, and do a window display for Calvin Klein and have my work in the living room of some rich person’s winter home in Zermatt.

What, then, are your feelings on the social factors one might largely depend on within the Art industry?

I’m quite positive that everything I have is through my friends, and I hope to help the people I support in the same way. I’m sure it doesn’t always happen this way, but when I’m a bit tipsy, the optimist in me sneaks out.

To what effect, as an artist, do you see yourself as being a commodity in service of the industry’s system and its function? And conversely, as being a commodity in power of it?

On a foundation level, visual art has the ability to communicate while circumventing language. In that, I mean that I have the belief that visual art comes from cave paintings and murals in churches, for people who were illiterate and had stone carvings of bibles. So, purely on a communicational level, anyone should have the ability to look at an art work and get something from it. This is a bit oversimplifying things. In the history of art, there is the importance of breaking those very ideas. But on the most basic level, I think visual art comes from a primal level of mystic communication that still evades language. I generally think that society has evolved in such a way where creative endeavors come last in relation to forming a functioning society. We need farmers and doctors before interior decorators. These are luxuries of the moment and society I exist in. Art is great because you can always say “fuck you” and not explain or change anything. I think art is the only career you can say you specialize in even if no one is hiring you for it. I’m not sure I would trust a plumber no one hires.

Are you personally able to imagine a system or an industry of art that is somehow less dependent on the factors of which it relies and has essentially created it in the first place?

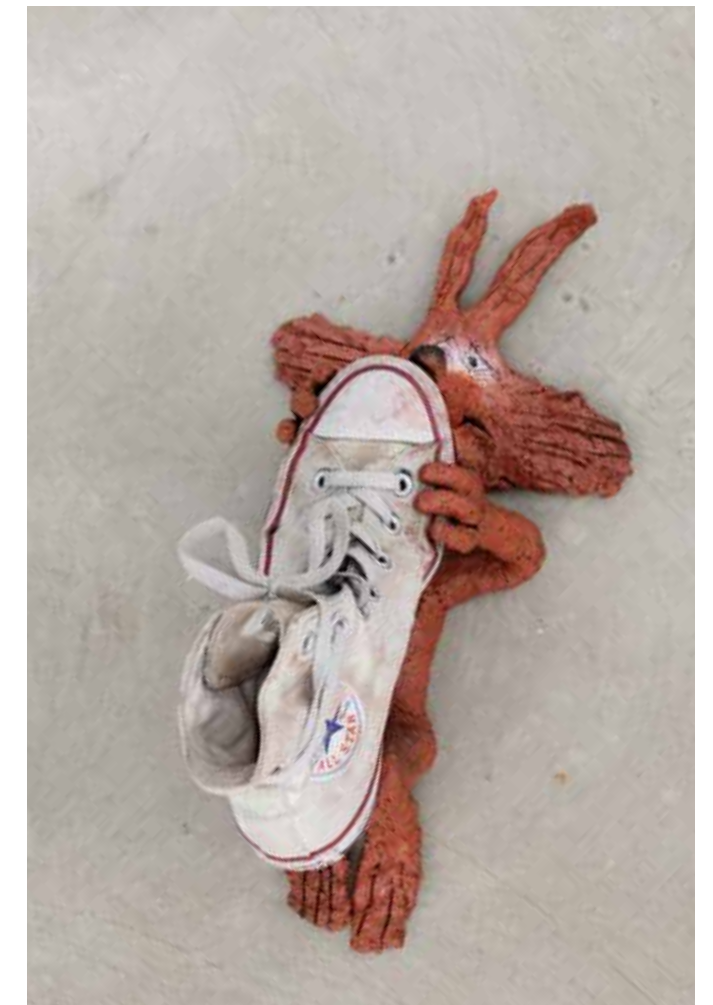
No, but I also lack the creativity to imagine a society functioning outside capitalism. I hope someone can tell me though.

Do you believe that one’s legacy will always be an important consideration for an artist?

Probably not. It’s something I think about, but with the desire to mess it up. When I die, I hope to have someone break into every institution and private home that holds my work and destroy it. My work won’t outlive me for long.



Keepin' it 100, 2019. Tin, lavender, paper and keychain, 36 x 17 x 10 cm © Cassidy Toner. Courtesy of GALERIE PHILIPPZOLLINGER, Zurich.



Wile E. Coyote Goes for a Walk (Left), 2019. Shoe, spray-paint on clay, 23 x 41 x 21 cm © Cassidy Toner. Courtesy of GALERIE PHILIPPZOLLINGER, Zurich.