

SPRING 2020 MENSWEAR | JUNE 24, 2019

## Meet the Artist Behind Celine's Cheeky New Graphics

By Emilia Petrarca  @emiliapetrarca



Photo: Pascal Le Segretain/Getty Images

Hedi Slimane is not known for his sense of humor. His models never smile and you can't see their eyes, because they're usually behind sunglasses. They shove their hands in their pockets when they walk, strutting in sync with the rock and roll soundtrack. They're not funny; they're cool.

But for Slimane's second menswear collection at Celine, presented on Sunday night in Paris, the designer's hyper-specific sense of style seemed to crossover into self-awareness and maybe even self-mockery. Straw tote bags and colorful (!) T-

shirts were covered in cheeky phrases like “My own worst enemy,” and “I have nostalgia for things I have probably never known.” They were borrowed from the artist David Kramer, whose work is often inspired by lifestyle advertisements from the 1970s.

Kramer was shocked to get an email from Celine about a collaboration — he thought it was spam — but he and Slimane actually have a lot in common. Since starting at Celine, Slimane has mined the house’s archives, especially those from the ’70s, to evoke a sense of nostalgia that somehow feels new. Now in his second season, he seems more comfortable. The spring 2020 menswear show was his most playful and casual to date, with color, sequins, and even overalls. Maybe Slimane does have a sense of humor after all. Below, a conversation with Kramer, who helped bring it out.

**How did this collaboration come about? Were you familiar with the work of Hedi Slimane before?**

I must admit when I got the original email saying that Hedi was interested in collaborating, I thought it was kind of a joke — perhaps even some kind of internet scam! Of course, I had heard of Celine and Hedi is such a legend.

**Is this your first fashion collaboration? If yes, why now?**

Well, no. I have never done a fashion collaboration before but I have made T-shirts, hats, and pins using my paintings as the inspiration. Usually when I do a gallery show I like to have some kind of performative experience for the viewer. Either they wear T-shirts or sit on furniture that is custom made for the show or drink wine or beers which I made the labels for ... But this experience is on a whole other level.



gretain/Getty Images

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**Your art is inspired by images from the past; Hedi Slimane is mining the history of Celine. At what point in time do you meet? How does your vision of nostalgia overlap?**

I am always interested in nostalgia, but mostly I am looking back as if trying to find what I missed out on. I definitely was excited that Hedi and I both seem to share a respect for history, but neither of us seemed stuck in the past.

**Why did you pick these works in particular? How do they translate to 2019? To a fashion runway?**

I showed Hedi a large collection of images of my work and we quickly narrowed the field down to these. He never looked back. I am confident this body of work is perfect in tone and style for right now. Hedi knows exactly what he is doing.

**The way you combine images and text is well-suited for our meme-saturated age. Why do you think customers crave ironic statements on clothing right now?**

I like to think I was making handmade memes back in the analog days. Yes, my work seems to be perfect for Instagram, but really by accident. I’ve always been interested in humor and satire and self-deprecating jokes. I think the jokes have always had a universal quality which had always made my work so popular at art fairs. Why wouldn’t people crave them on shirts and bags?

**Do you think your works bring a sense of humor to the collection? Melancholy? What emotions?**

I really can’t get over how brave Hedi is. I mean taking my self-deprecating one-liners and putting them on clothing seems like the opposite of what I would think of for the fashion world. But here we are, and it looks great.

CELINE

celine  
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Voir le profil



**CELINE**

**If you had to review the collection with a single phrase, what would it be? Your impression of menswear right now?**

Brilliant. That's the one word that comes to mind.

**What's the worst phrase you've seen on a piece of clothing recently?**

I saw a 13-year-old kid in Brooklyn wearing a Nike knockoff T-shirt that said, "Just do me." I almost spit out my coffee on the subway platform.

**What piece from the collection would you wear yourself?**

Any of them! I especially love the sneakers. I tend to be pretty utilitarian in my fashion choices up til now. I am definitely going to start to step up my game!





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L'UOMO

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PARIS, JUNE 23, 2019  
by SARAH MOWER

“I have nostalgia for things I have probably never known....There is no irony here.” Okay. Hedi Slimane didn’t speak these words—direct quoting not being his style—but he let the artist David Kramer say them for him in a book of posters given out at the show. Slimane (born 1968) and Kramer (born 1963) are soul mates, doomed to be eternally pissed that they were born fractionally too late to experience the rock-and-roll hedonism of the early ’70s. They didn’t get to swagger high-waist flares and dandified Savile Row tailored suits; to go backstage around the Stones when they were heading hippie in ’67; to seriously don panamas and grow their hair long—when all that was damned new and cool.

The return to boyhood dreams has been a recurring theme in the menswear collections this season. The connection Slimane made with Kramer’s work revealingly tied it all back into that same thing. He laid it all out for a new generation in the repertoire of high-hoicked, butt-clinching boot-cut pants and jeans, tiny bomber jackets, and all the minutely observed retailored throwbacks to rock-aristocracy style he marched out on the Celine runway.

Slimane made no concessions in the way he showed it. There was no variance on his long-established method of plunging his audience into darkness, the grand installation at the beginning—in this case, a boy in a silver glitter three-piece suit, transported on a rolling throne of a thing, surmounted by disco lights.

Fashion theme, rinsed and systematized as accessible product—in this case, aviators, pointy woven-leather Chelsea boots, and skinny ties—is Slimane’s claim on commercial dominance. It can seem emotionless, this method—his way or the highway. It will also inevitably catch criticism for his casting—there were only three black models on what appeared to be an otherwise all-Caucasian runway. The music scene never looked like that in the ’70s, and it certainly does not today. That lack of diversity might be a preventative to this Celine collection speaking as widely as it could across today’s generation.

The collection checked many boxes, registering that proto-hippy moment when white kids began to travel, picking up peasant baskets and hanging out in North Africa—the splendid gold-embroidered burnoose cape at the finale chimed in with a lot of other collections this season. Bringing up this era undoubtedly has resonance for a young generation who’s definitely not been born into fun times; Slimane’s right about that. But somehow the habitual narrowness of his focus missed the inclusive way that kids see the world today.

# Celine: la nuova collezione uomo parla con le frasi dell'artista David Kramer

DI ITALO PANTANO

24 GIUGNO 2019

Un'intervista esclusiva sulla collaborazione tra Hedi Slimane e David Kramer per la collezione Celine uomo primavera estate 2020

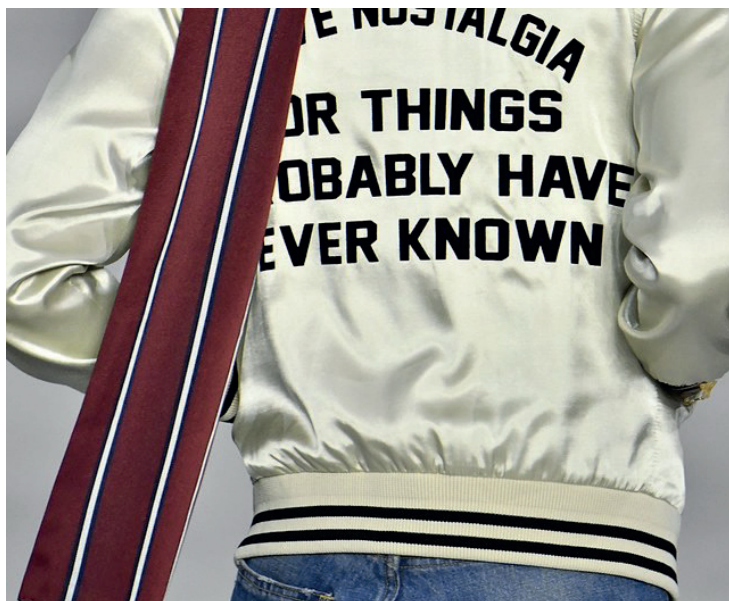


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La nuova collezione Celine uomo primavera estate 2020 ha sfilato ieri alla Paris Men's Fashion Week, uno degli eventi più attesi in calendario che ha rivelato la collaborazione tra l'artista **David Kramer** e la maison diretta da **Hedi Slimane**.

T-shirt, giacche e accessori della nuova collezione uomo firmata Celine, sono tele e pagine bianche che accolgono le frasi dell'artista statunitense. **Parole ironiche**, come ci ha raccontato Kramer, che si incontrano con il lo **stile sexy e decadente** di Slimane, dando vita a nuovi racconti che ci fanno conoscere lo **humor colto** del designer francese.

David Kramer ci ha raccontato tutto sulla collaborazione.



Le parole di David Kramer su una giacca della collezione Celine uomo primavera estate 2020

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### **Come è nata la collaborazione con Celine?**

Be', in realtà è stato divertente. Quando il team di Celine ha mandato un'e-mail a una galleria con cui lavoro, spiegando che stavano cercando di contattarmi per sapere se fossi interessato a collaborare a un progetto con la maison, i ragazzi della galleria erano sicuri che si trattasse di una truffa! Ad ogni modo sono stato piuttosto attivo negli ultimi 10/12 anni in cui ho partecipato alle fiere d'arte, e ho immaginato di aver attirato la loro attenzione. Sono contento di aver risposto a quella mail!

### **Qual è il tuo pezzo preferito della collezione?**

Adoro i pezzi che usano i miei dipinti e li trasformo in ricami su borse e tutto il resto. Ma adoro anche le sneakers. Un paio di scarpe da ginnastica di pelle bianca con le parole "...I STILL DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS GETTING ME ANYWHERE." Quelle sono fantastiche!

### **Qual è l'aspetto distintivo del tuo lavoro e come l'hai portato nella collaborazione con Hedi Slimane?**

Odio definirmi un artista basato sul testo, ma in realtà è molto di quello che faccio. Faccio quadri e opere che nascono da qualche osservazione divertente o da un commento auto ironico. Anche se le mie parole sono solitamente personali, alla fine sembrano sempre tradursi in frasi universalità. Ammiro



molto Hedi per aver visto il potere di quelle parole e averle integrate nel guardaroba contemporaneo di Celine. Sono davvero emozionato di come Hedi abbia abbracciato tutto questo. Ho portato il mio solito "bagaglio di trucchi" e Hedi ha lavorato con quelli. Mescolare umorismo e auto riflessione nella moda è davvero coraggioso secondo me!



Le parole di David Kramer su una borsa della collezione Celine uomo primavera estate 2020

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# HYPERALLERGIC

PHOTO ESSAYS

## Spring Break Is an Oasis for Art Fair Haters

If you want to experience some of the most uplifting energy in New York's art community, I'd suggest checking out this beloved art show.

Hrag Vartanian | 2 days ago



Painting by Ryan Michael Ford (all photographs by the author for Hyperallergic)

During Armory Week, people like to gripe about art fairs. There's a certain art world cred that comes with the disdain people demonstrate towards the realities of the art gallery system being laid bare. The [Spring/Break fair](#) is different, not because of the way the art is presented (though that's somewhat true), but more because of the spirit of this scrappy affair that appears to prize quirky projects that often fall

outside the purview of more commercial ventures. Whether you're seeking a rainbow KKK robe (see Jeffrey Songco), giant Cheetos-looking sculptures (paging Andy Harman), a contemporary take on Judith and Holofernes (um, Rebecca Morgan), or Islamic-inspired tile work with penises (Hossein Edalatkah's got something you can look at) you can find it here.

The experience may be overwhelming but the location of the fair in the old Condé Nast offices (currently administered by Chashama) overlooking Times Square is an excellent way to see this part of the city through the office windows all around.

Wander the halls and see mostly independent curator-led projects — some galleries and nonprofits sneaked in — and enjoy the energy that feels like a blend of an open studio event and a more conventional art fair.



Works by David Kramer, curated by Michael Buckland



Bryce Zackery's "300 Dollar Man" (2018), which was a special project curated by Equity Gallery and Oklahoma Contemporary



Sculpture by Jack Henry and paintings by Christophe Avella-Bagur, Jeanette Hayes, and Brian Willmont in *Human Now*, curated by Kara Brooks



Part of the Eric Mistretta installation, curated by Anna Kustera



Sound-based works by Foo/Skou Echo Chamber, curated by Gabriel Barcia-Colombo

*interview*

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# David Kramer

*fields* editor Sean Redmond first came across David Kramer's work nearly 10 years ago. He has since followed his career in earnest, watching as Kramer gained representation by European art galleries and his paintings and writings appeared in *The New York Times*. Kramer's art appeals to the pessimism that has taken hold since the Great Recession, and he evokes nostalgia for the ever-fading concept of the American Dream with a wink and a nod. His work can seem sardonic, yet is surprisingly warm and honest in a distinctively American way. After trying and failing to interview Kramer for our first issue, we were excited to finally speak with him about his life and work.









*I don't remember how I became introduced to your work... It was in 2007 or 2008. I had printed out copies of your drawings and put them on my wall, just these pieces of paper. And then I left them—I lived in Japan for a few years, and I left them in America, and I was trying to think, because I remembered you and I wanted to see what you'd been up to, but I couldn't remember your name. So I made my parents dig through my belongings to find those pieces of paper that I'd printed out and determine your signature on the paper, so I could look up your name. And they were like, "I can't read it! There's a K and some letters..." and I remembered it was Kramer, something Kramer! I spent a whole day trying to figure it out.*

**DK:** I'll tell you a really funny story. As a

kid growing up—I was born in Manhattan, but I grew up mostly in New Rochelle, in Westchester [County, New York]. So when I was a kid, I lived in a house in the suburbs in the '70s, and we would get all these magazines delivered to our house, like *Life* and *Look* and *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*. And as a kid, I just loved looking at the cartoons in *The New Yorker*, they were always this—they still are these iconic-looking things. So anyway, I had heard, about two years ago, four years ago, I had heard that you could go up and see Bob Mankoff, the cartoon editor, and he would entertain looking at cartoonists' work. So I gathered up some drawings that I thought he might like—I don't really think of myself as a *New Yorker* cartoonist, but people have said to me enough, "Oh,





**How come, despite all of my efforts to make a name for myself, I seem to have had little or no effect...**

**...Unless of course, that name that I came up with is one that very few people are willing to say out loud, and in public.**

your jokes are like *New Yorker* jokes”—so I gathered up some stuff and went up there to pay a visit, to the Condé Nast office in Times Square, and I went up on the elevator and I sat on this couch in this empty room, and he invited me in, and I talked to him. I met with him actually more than once, and he was telling me that he really liked my work, and it was really interesting to him, but in the end, the last time I met with him, he said to me, it was very rejecting, he said, “You

know, we at *The New Yorker*”—and he used those words—“we have this iconic look to our works, and your work doesn’t really fit in the *New Yorker* model. And we’re not going to change that for you, you know, this is something we’ve built, and I like your work, but I’m the cartoon editor, and we’re never going to publish it.” So I went back out, and I was sitting on the couch, and by that point, I’d gotten to meet the cartoonists from the two or three times I’d been up there. So this

guy says, “What’s in your portfolio? I want to see,” and so I opened up my portfolio, and I was showing him my work, and this other cartoonist says, “That guy is ripping off David Kramer!” And I said, “Wait a minute! I *am* David Kramer!” And he goes, “No way! I have some of your drawings on the wall in my workroom! I’ve seen them online, I’ve printed a couple of them and I just really love these things.” And I was like, “Are you kidding me?” and it was such a funny, amazing moment. So then I was leaving and I was taking the elevator down, and I got on the elevator with these—even these old-school cartoonists who still publish regularly come on Wednesday, to see Bob Mankoff at that time—and I got on the elevator with this guy who was a regular, published *New Yorker* cartoonist, and he said to me “So, what do you get for your drawings?” And I said, “What do you mean?” and he said, “What do you sell them for?” and I tell him “You know, I sell them for a couple thousand dollars each.” And he says, “Why the fuck are you coming here? We get like nothing to publish these!” [*laughing*] Anyway, I still was dejected, but I left feeling kind of redeemed after that. Sort of like a loser story with a nice silver lining to it.

*That’s wild, that you’re so recognized. It seems that sort of thing happens fairly often.*

**DK:** It still surprises me every time.

*So you live in New York. Have you always lived in New York?*

**DK:** Well I was born in Manhattan, and I

moved with my family when I was just a young kid to New Rochelle. I grew up in the suburbs. My parents were both workers, both had jobs in New York, and when I was old enough to be in high school, I remember saying to them, “Why do you get to go to the city every day and I’m stuck here?” I went to college not in New York, I went to Washington, D.C.—I applied to NYU but did not get in, I got into George Washington University and I went there. And while I was there I enjoyed being there, it was great, but as soon as I realized, really, that I wanted to be an artist, that that was what I wanted to do with my life... I finished school and I immediately moved to New York and went to Pratt, in Brooklyn, and I’ve lived in New York ever since. And I graduated from GW in 1985, so I’ve lived in New York since ’85.

*And you were just in D.C. last week?*

**DK:** I was. I have a sister that lives there now, so I went to visit her with my son and my wife and spent a couple of days there. I hadn’t been there in four years or so.

*To visit your sister?*

**DK:** Yeah, it was nice. My younger sister is a terrific person, but she makes me feel guilty, like I haven’t visited her in so long. I was supposed to visit her about a year ago, I had planned a whole visit, and then I got invited to do a show in Paris, and I blew off visiting her, and she’s been mad at me for a year. [*laughing*] I didn’t like the treatment I was getting, so I succumbed to her anger and went to go visit her.



*You mentioned a show in Paris. You have some shows happening in Paris right now, at the Galerie Laurent Godin and the Centre Pompidou, yes?*

**DK:** That's right. In fact, tonight is the opening, the *Grand Vernissage* for the show where I'm showing some videos. I didn't have the money to travel to Paris to go to the party; it would have been really nice and I would have gone if I could have, but it's really amazing. For whatever reason, my career over the past five, six years has been really dominated by shows in Europe. I've had a few shows in New York, and I did a show in Washington four years ago, I've done some shows in America and I've done some shows at some art fairs in New York, I've had a lot of great exposure in Miami, but for whatever reason the Europeans seem to really like my work a lot, which is really amazing to me, because, you know, in France, they don't like to speak English. [*laughing*] They all do speak English, but they don't like it. And my work has gone over really well in Paris, I have a gallery in Brussels that I work with, and I'm going to have a show in Munich in September, I did a show two years ago in Beirut... It's really amazing to have these shows in these different countries, these different cultures. I guess, in some ways, from an outsider's perspective, my work is very American, in a way that travels well.

*Do you think that's why Europeans have more interest in it?*

**DK:** They're just smarter. [*laughing*]

*Touché.*

**DK:** I do think that America is a really interesting experiment to a lot of other people, and I think that they do have a love and hate relationship with American culture, because they love film and books and art and culture from America, but they do kind of feel overwhelmed and sometimes like it's stuffed down the throats of outsiders, because pop culture is in many ways an American export. But I do think... in many ways, honestly, I feel like what I'm always doing is writing about or painting and writing about things that are on a very personal perspective, but the universality, the way that I address these things, pokes holes in that American façade. And I think that gets appreciated outside of America, because I think that, you know, it's not just laughing at America, but laughing at oneself for aspiring to what is so American. And I think that that is what is appreciated outside of America, this sort of pathos of aspiration that people love and hate about their own selves, because they're like *why is it that we all love and want these things that have been imported or exported from America?* So I think that that is part of what it is, I think that is part of why my work has been received well abroad, for that reason.

*Yeah, it really seems to strike a chord. A lot of your work deals with themes of addiction and disappointment and anxiety about the future, and these are difficult, serious topics, of course, but the way you tackle them is almost lighthearted. In your paintings and drawings you have this '70s-style advertisement aesthetic,*

*and that, combined with the way that you twist these clichés into not quite cynical expressions of hope—you can see behind it. You are sort of pulling aside the curtain, and there is this subtext of Is this something that is worth striving for? And I do think that this creates a sense of wistfulness for an American dream that maybe never really was.*

**DK:** You said “cynical,” and to me, I’m more into the satire of it. The satire is that every day I wake up and think that I’m going to accomplish my goal—but my goals are so absurd! [*laughing*] The goals are like I’m going to run it off into the sunset and have drinks in a beautiful lounge with some gorgeous woman, but these goals are just ludicrous, so then I go to sleep disappointed.

*Are those really your goals?*

**DK:** I’m being a little facetious, but the satire, that is my goal. To live the advertisements that I saw in those magazines, growing up as a kid, on the coffee table in the house in the suburbs, it’s like *this is what it’s supposed to be like*. It’s supposed to be this urban lifestyle, just fantastic, and all the details are gorgeous, the settings are right, it’s all art directed—but I could hardly live out those dreams. So I paint them, I draw them. I vicariously live them through my work. And the text, like I said, is deeply personal in a certain way; there are ultimate truths about where I’m at in reality when I’m making the piece of work that I’m making that are somehow distilled and written onto the surface of what I’m drawing. So yeah, I’m aspiring to

things that, as you said yourself, and I would totally say that, they are things that I don’t know if they’ve ever existed. But because I’ve seen an image of it, it’s got to be true, and I’ve got to have it, I’ve got to experience it. And it may not be real—it might just be something that was set up in the studio, that was created. I’ve never watched that TV show *Mad Men*, I’ve never seen it, I don’t know why, it’s just sort of escaped me. But I bring it up because I really understand that whole era of advertising very well, and I find it really fascinating. That was during an era when there was no Photoshop. There were photographs taken of things, and every detail was set up in the take, and it was taken. And maybe you could go back and airbrush it, and change it a little bit, but really what you had was what was there, there was no ability to go back and collage things in like there is digitally now. It was real for an instant, and that’s the instant that I’m chasing after, which is completely fleeting.

*It’s very clear that advertisements played an important role in the development of your aesthetic, but what about artists? Who have you looked to for inspiration? Who helped you to cultivate your style? Some of your work—especially some of your more recent landscape pieces—bears a similarity to the work of Ed Ruscha.*

**DK:** I would say that Roy Lichtenstein is the person whose work I just adore, but at the same time, late Philip Guston’s work is work that I just adore as well. Lichtenstein’s slickness and topicalness is completely met in

this way from Guston with this clunkiness and gritty reality. So, in terms of modern art, those guys really influenced me a lot. But even though I've lived on the East Coast my whole life, I have to say that Ed Ruscha and that sort of Californian conceptualism from the '70s is really influential to me. There's something very smart about West Coast art; there's this patience about it that you don't see in East Coast art that I really admire.

*It has a more relaxed atmosphere.*

**DK:** Yeah, I mean I like Ed Ruscha, but I also like a guy from Vancouver, Rodney Graham. Rodney Graham produces videos, and they're just really intense, long-winded jokes, and I find that really fantastic, that he can build a joke and make a film of it. You know, you have a joke and then you have to produce it, and really produce it, and I think that's really interesting. I don't see much of that kind of work in New York right now, and I think that's why New York has always been kind of difficult for me in some ways, in terms of getting a really good reputation here, because it's a different take on art—it's not as slow, it's much more immediate, in your face. *Pop.*

*Ruscha once said that he likes "the idea of a word becoming a picture, almost leaving its body, then coming back and becoming a word again." How do you approach text in your images? Do you typically come up with the phrases first, or the pictures, and then match the phrases to them?*

**DK:** The reason why the images are so important to me, as an artist, is that the

rendering of the image is really where the words come out of. It's sort of like while I'm looking at something and trying to recreate it in some way, in my own terms, is when my mind begins to race and when I start to have an inner dialogue, which is where the language comes from. So no, I do not tend to know what I'm going to say on a piece of canvas or a piece of paper until I'm in the process of making it, which is why I haven't really ever been able to make work that is just text alone on paper that is satisfying to me. I think that what Ed Ruscha does is brilliant. Maybe he would accept it if I said that he's a great craftsman, but his words are super smart—I think he intellectualizes the entire process of what he's going to do from the beginning to the end, and I would say that he's a craftsman because he can render what it is that he's already thought of. I don't really think that I can render like him, nor do I think that I can come up with ideas in a vacuum. I really need to be in the throes of making something in order to come up with my ideas. That's why the image is so vital to me. It's not finding an image to satisfy text. That said, sometimes I'm on the train and I think of something and I'm just like *that is so funny, I gotta go write that.* That does happen. But generally speaking, the text in my work is the result of the work that I've done, and so it's always sort of—I don't want to say it's the last stage of anything that I do, but it comes at a point in the process where it does, at times, become the reason for the entire project, all the way at the end. Like writing "happy birthday" on top of a cake. You've done all the work, and then you write "happy birthday," and then it's a birthday cake.

*What do you look for in images that you're using?  
How do you go about choosing?*

**DK:** I think for a very long time—this body of work I've made over the past five or six years—came initially from looking at magazines, and looking at vintage *Playboy* magazines and vintage *Life* magazines, and really just trying to capture the buttery light of those photographs—the clay in the paper. And more recently I've become more interested in finding images... I'm really looking for this element of perfection: the perfect sunset, the perfect smile. It comes from, a lot of times, now, from iPhone shots of things that I'm seeing. That's what the landscapes really are becoming, more and more, just images out of my own traveling; looking at things and trying to replicate those images. I'm really interested now in landscapes. I think that the figures in my pieces were really great, and there was a real fantasy to that, but I think that there's a real fantasy to landscapes, too.

*Can you elaborate on that?*

**DK:** Well, I think that there's a fantasy of trying to paint the perfect sunset, or the perfect beach scene, the perfect mountain. It's really escapism. And as much as I love looking at Roy Lichtenstein, I also just grew up in a certain way looking at those paintings in the galleries in Washington, D.C., looking at the Monets and the Soutines and these real Expressionist, European paintings. And I'm really fascinated with that kind of painting, which is just elusive to me. I'm trying to paint something that's just beautiful. But I'm still

attaching text to it because it seems like a fitting way of completing these paintings—not that I need a solution, but because it's like an endless road until all of a sudden the meaning of the painting emerges through the process of making it, and then I write this thing on it that sort of makes sense to me.

*Your earlier pieces used a more limited palette, and the text was often scratched out; there was more of a sloppiness to your work. And now you work on larger canvases, with more color and a cleaner look, and you've shifted from people and cars to landscapes. How else do you see your work as having evolved?*

**DK:** I definitely think that I've learned how to paint recently.

*Really?*

**DK:** I think that, in a certain way, before, I was limiting myself. There was a long period of time where I was making drawings, and I was just making monochromatic drawings, using red ink, blue ink, red drawings with blue text, blue drawings with red text. I was really just learning how to draw at that point in some ways, and now I've started to use colors again, and—yeah, I'm learning how to paint right now. And it's much more difficult—sometimes I just look at my paintings and I think I'm just a really bad photorealist painter. [*laughing*] Because what I'm trying to do is capture something that comes from a photographic image, in a way—you know, I do paint from photographs. I paint from and look at things for inspiration. And I



don't trust my own memory; I look at things and images that I've seen that resonate with me and I want to replicate that, but in the process it becomes distilled, it never looks like what it is that I photographed or looked at. I don't think that I want to become any more realistic than I am, I just want to somehow become more comfortable with the materials, with the paints, and let them do the talking.

*Interesting. I wouldn't have assumed that you were going for a more realistic style.*

**DK:** Because I'm really bad at it! *[laughing]*

*Well, I'm kind of glad that you're not better at it. The roughness is appealing.*

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*You have an exhibit happening right now called Stand/Up, is that correct? And that's a collection of your videos?*

**DK:** No. It's a pretty big group show, curated by a couple of people, about artists who have used humor to make their point in their work. And they just included a couple of my videos. There was a long period of time where I was making a lot of videos, and that's sort of subsided—recently I've been getting back into it—but the videos I made for a very long time were very much narrative videos, and they were usually—some of them were very elaborate, they involved costumes and sets that I'd built, and some of them were more straightforward, with me just talking. But they always tried to take something that was happening to me in my life and tried to distill

it for a moment into an art piece. For a long time the videos that I made were really about being kind of a loser in the art world all the time, being left out in the art world all the time. There was a lot of stuff there to make good films about that was really enjoyable, and it was really refreshing. But what happened was I started to have a lot more success with my work, and that narrative sort of lost its teeth to me, and I really stopped making films a few years ago because I felt that it was disingenuous to make films where the complaint was the premise of the film. So I kind of lost my thread there, of what was feeding the films, and so I stopped making films for a while. And now I'm getting myself back into making videos, but in a very different way right now.

*Yeah, I saw some of the clips online, and I was very surprised, they were very funny. They have an unself-conscious charm, like the sort of viral videos that you always see going around.*

**DK:** Well, I will say one other thing, and that is, around five or six years ago, YouTube suddenly emerged. And I really felt that, at that point, it had taken a lot away from what it was... I felt that my films were really based in a lot of ways on art videos. In some ways they were all jokes about what art videos look like in galleries. Some of them that I was seeing were just terrible, boring, self-serving kind of films, and I was kind of riffing on that, making my own terrible, boring, self-serving films. That was always my joke! People would say "What are your films like?" and I'd say, "Oh, they're terrible!"

I mean, that was really the point of them, in a way—they were sad and terrible and funny. But then when I saw YouTube I was like *oh my god, I've really got to stop making films*—all these people are doing this so much better than me! [*laughing*]

*I don't know if they're better than you, but you did seem to be ahead of the curve on that one.*

**DK:** To me, what it really was, it wasn't that it was better, it was just that I needed to build a joke or a story or a punch line through a long-winded construction, and there were people who could just blow up a microwave oven in their backyard, and they'd get a million hits! I just couldn't compete with the immediacy of YouTube videos. And now I actually think, as I understand it, it seems like there's a saturation with that stuff, and now there's a time again for the films that I was making. The audience has become more patient now, because they know what the joke looks like, they've seen that joke a million times; it's not funny anymore to see a microwave blow up in the backyard. So I think my films were ahead of the curve, and now the curve is catching up, perhaps. It's great to be showing these films at the Pompidou, I feel very excited about that. I wish I could have gone tonight to the opening—that would have been fun. Next time.

*I will say, there's a warmth to your videos that's always been latent in your drawings and paintings, but it really comes to the surface, your sense of doubt and self-deprecation—it feels a*

*lot more personal in this setting. What drives you to share your thoughts and insecurities in this fashion?*

**DK:** Well, a long time ago, at Pratt, the motto of the school was “Be true to your art and your art will be true to you.” I never really enjoyed being in art school, and I worked very hard to forget everything they taught me there, but there is this idea that—and it's true in comedy also—the best jokes have truth to them. The only way you can really render a joke that's really funny is if it's totally true. I was looking at some Facebook stuff, and someone had posted this Louis C.K. stand-up routine about him being broke, and I was just laughing out loud, it was just so funny, because it was made in 2004, and he could talk about being broke because at the time I'm sure he was totally broke! And in a certain regard—I'm not trying to say that I'm like a comedian—but in a certain regard I am like a clown. I don't know if you saw this video I did, which was this “Million Dollar Moment” video which I made. It was all based on *The Fountainhead*, and the story was—the true story was that I got a phone call from this curator, and he said to me, “Listen, I've heard about your work, and I want to put you in this show we're doing. It's going to be a really great show. There are a lot of people talking about your work, and we're real excited, me and this other guy, Robert Storr, we're huge art critics putting this show together, and we want you to be in it. We're going to give you a big wall to do your work in.” And I was like *wow, this is totally exciting*, it was going to be at an excellent gallery in Manhattan, the Feigen Contemporary,

which is no longer open, but it was a great gallery. And I hung up the phone, and five minutes later I got a call from this woman from a gallery in Brooklyn that I sometimes would work with, and she said, “Did you get a call from this guy named Charlie Finch?” and I said yes, I did, and she said, “Forget everything that he told you, because he wanted this guy named David Brody’s phone number, and I gave him yours by accident.” So I was like—*What?* I hung up the phone with her, and this guy Charlie had called me on my cell phone, and so two or three hours later I called him up, I was like, “Charlie Finch—Charlie, this is David Kramer,” and it was dead silent on the other end of the phone. And I said, “Listen, I know what happened, and I know that you didn’t really mean to call me, but this guy David Brody who you were looking for, he’s a friend of mine, and his studio is literally just down the block from where my studio is”—he was literally on the same block in Brooklyn. And I said, “You don’t owe me anything, but I think it would be really nice, really generous of you, if you were to come, when you go visit his studio, if you would come by my studio and take a look at what I’m doing.” And he said, “I’m going to come, and I’m going to come with an open mind.” And he came, and he included me in the show. And then the show opened, and they sold everything that I had on the wall, and then they offered me a show at the

gallery. So I went to a meeting with the guy who ran the gallery, and he goes, “We really want to do a show with you,” and I said, “That is really amazing. I have a really funny story to tell you.” And I told him the story of how I got in the show, and he said, “Never tell anyone that story ever again.” So I made a film about it. *[laughing]* Don’t tell me what I shouldn’t do, because I’m gonna do it!

So I made a film about it, and I couched the whole film in *The Fountainhead*, because to me that book was really what it was supposed to be like, there was some major critic who was going to find you. Well, I’m not talking about how Howie Roark was completely beaten down by those major critics, but he was beaten down because he wouldn’t say *yes* to those critics! But you know, it’s about a singular vision, and winning out, and your art being really important, and that was all the stuff that I based my existence on. And here it was, I got into a show completely by accident! That changed my life for a while. And I thought the idea of making a film about your life being changed by accident seemed really interesting to me, because that really is the crux of everything for me. What you expect and what you get are rarely the same. □

*Interview by Sean Redmond.  
Photography by Gilles Bonugli Kali  
(pages 143, 151) and Susan Alzner  
(pages 154-155).*



## david kramer : american exports

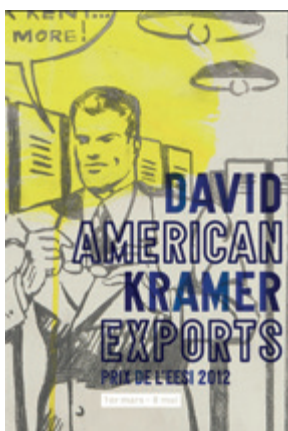
*exposition / du 1er mars au 8 mai 2012*

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Prix de l'École européenne supérieure de l'image 2012, **David Kramer** succède à Dominique Goblet et Jochen Gerner. *American exports*, sa première exposition monographique en France, présente un choix de dessins et de peintures ainsi qu'une installation conçue pour l'occasion et réalisée avec des étudiants de l'ÉESI au cours d'un *workshop* incluant la mise en espace des œuvres.

Pour la première fois depuis sa création, le Prix de l'ÉESI est attribué à un artiste pour qui le dessin comme l'écrit occupent une place centrale mais n'est pas un auteur de bande dessinée. Ce choix reflète l'ouverture du Prix aux différentes pratiques enseignées à l'ÉESI. S'inspirant des clichés de la société de consommation américaine, les œuvres de David Kramer prennent pour sujet la réussite sociale, le monde de l'art, le bonheur conjugal, mais aussi les voitures, l'alcool et l'argent avec un humour omniprésent.

David Kramer est né en 1963 à New York, où il vit et travaille.



### production

École européenne supérieure de l'image  
la Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image

en partenariat avec  
la [galerie Laurent Godin](#).



### scénographie

Yann Grolleau  
assisté de Marine Vergne Figliolini, Carine Klonowski, Corine Mazaleyrat,  
Pauline Roland, Guillaume Berrut, Benjamin Brault, Roméo Julien

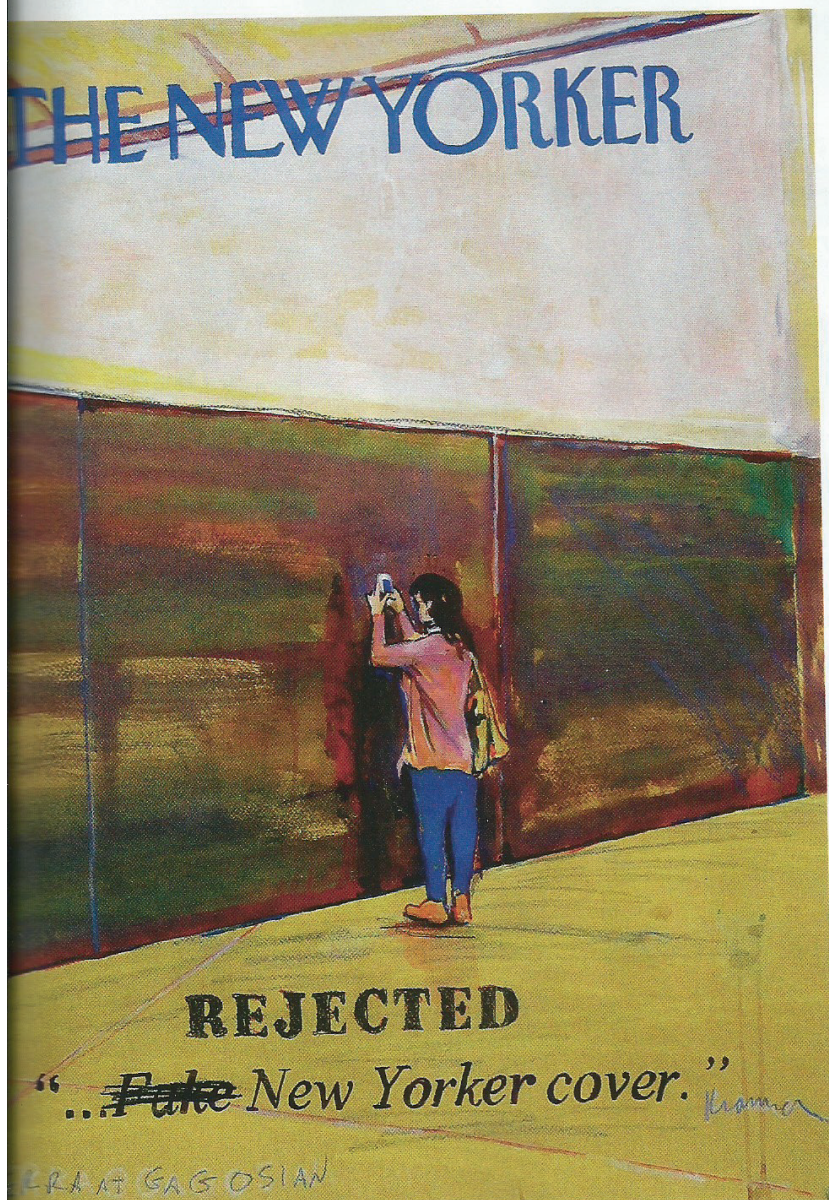
du **1er mars** au **8 mai** 2012

### lieu

Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image  
site Castro, galerie haute (niveau un)

121 rue de Bordeaux  
Angoulême





CI-DESSUS **Rejected New Yorker Cover**  
2014, encre, gouache et crayon sur papier, 65,5 x 50 cm.

CI-CONTRE **Self-Indulgent**  
2014, encre, gouache et crayon sur papier, 70 x 55 cm.

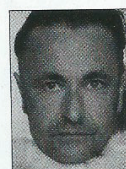
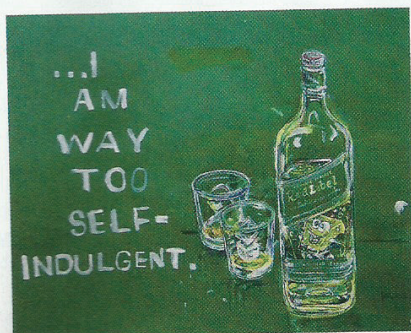


**DAVID KRAMER**  
**Pop culture**

Né en 1963,  
vit à New York

Ses dessins tiennent du comic strip interrompu : une case, une seule, avec toutefois du texte pour expliciter les pensées du personnage ou bien pour énoncer une morale sur un ton légèrement désabusé. À l'image de ce coucher de soleil encadré par ces mots (en anglais dans l'œuvre) : «Les choses iront mieux demain matin... comme toujours.» Les motifs et les figures sont ceux de la culture populaire américaine, Superman, le cow-boy, la maîtresse de maison, et tous sont comme saisis d'un doute sur leur condition, sur le sens de leur existence. Les couleurs, à la gouache, brillent un peu trop. Il y a quelque chose de changé au rayon rêve américain.

Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris · [www.laurentgodin.com](http://www.laurentgodin.com)

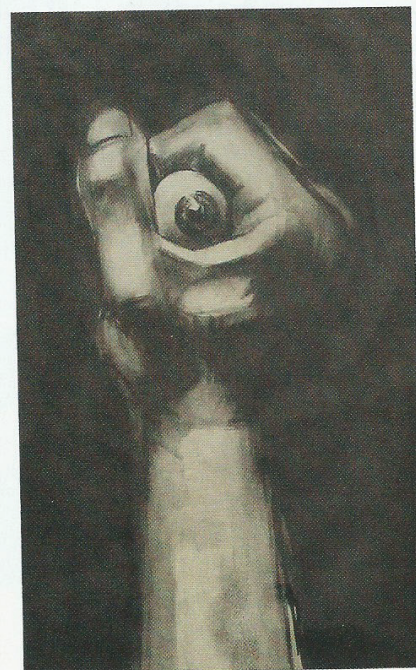


**JEAN-LUC BLANC**  
**Séries B sur papier**

Né en 1965, vit à Paris

Lui, comme beaucoup d'autres ici, on aurait pu le caser dans n'importe laquelle de nos catégories. Le cortège de créatures masquées, costumées, harnachées, travesties, maquillées qu'il dessine jour après jour aurait par exemple mérité qu'il soit nommé au rang de dessinateur attiré par les extravagances, la lascivité, le beau, le bizarre, l'innocent. Mais c'est sa fascination pour le cinéma bis, le giallo érotique et tous les mauvais genres qui alimentent les étals des magasins de DVD à 1 € le kilo qu'on a privilégiée. Son trait hésitant, très appuyé, un peu raide, révèle aussi son trouble devant ce lot de personnages et de situations tordues. D'ailleurs, Jean-Luc Blanc nous a un jour avoué ceci : «Parfois l'image se refuse à moi.» On a compris que le dessin, comme un amant ou une amante, peut aussi échouer à rester fidèle. Et ne parler que de ça, de cette histoire de rendez-vous ou de relation contrariée, manquée, reportée, voire ratée, avec une image.

Galerie Art : Concept, Paris · [www.galerieartconcept.com](http://www.galerieartconcept.com)  
Circonstance Galerie, Nice · <http://circonstance.com>



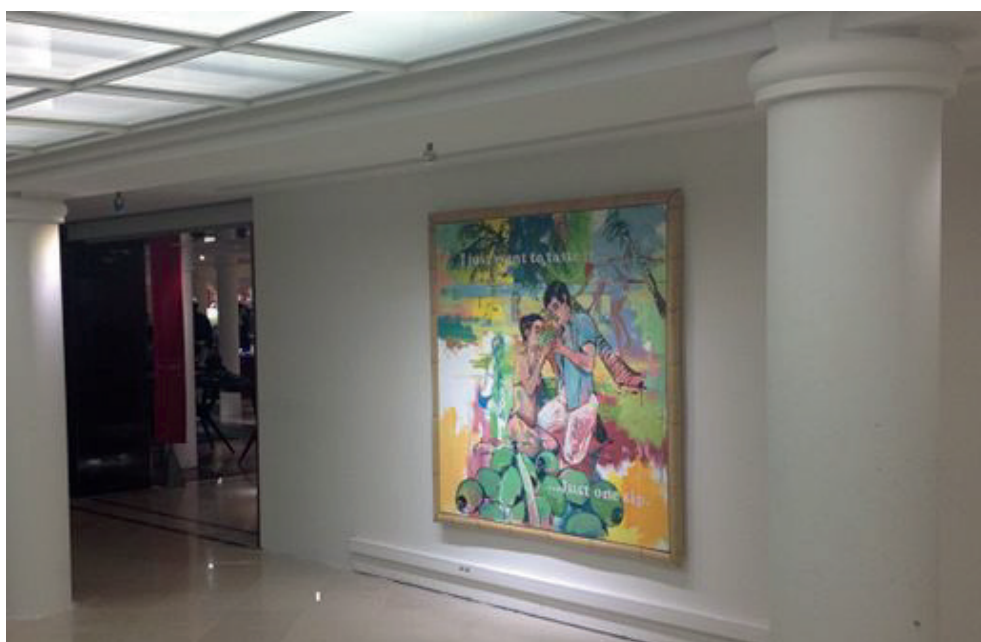
**Sans titre**  
2014, crayon sur papier, 20 x 30 cm.



**David KRAMER**

**« Galerie de l'Homme du Bon Marché Rive Gauche »**

niveau -1, du 19 janvier au 16 février



David Kramer, Vue d'exposition "Galerie de L'homme du Bon Marché Rive Gauche ».

*Just One Sip (How I Met Your Mother), 2010*

*Juste une gorgée (comment j'ai rencontré ta mère). Huile sur toile, bambou. 153 x 155 cm*

Courtesy Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris.

### **David KRAMER**

Né en 1963. Vit et travaille à New York. Représenté par la Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris.

Les œuvres de David Kramer nous livrent la vision satirique d'une société construite sur un modèle de réussite véhiculé par les studios d'Hollywood et les publicités de Madison Avenue.

À travers des anecdotes souvent personnelles, l'artiste joue avec les limites de la fiction et de la mémoire. De manière humoristique, David Kramer souligne le pathos du «rêve américain», dénonçant un idéal, tout en ayant conscience d'y être soumis.

The New York Times  
**Opinionator**

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APRIL 30, 2012, 7:00 AM

## Up in Smoke

By **DAVID KRAMER**

**Anxiety:** We worry. A gallery of contributors count the ways.

### Tags:

[Antidepressants](#), [Anxiety](#), [Art](#), [cigarettes](#), [health](#), [mental health](#), [smoking](#)

“What I Love Most” (oil on canvas) 2011, by David Kramer

I am an artist. Believe it or not, it is a pretty anxiety-provoking career.

After 20 years of juggling my art-making with my money-making I’ve finally started to make money from my art. Still, it is a dicey way to make a living.

Recently I got a call from my French art dealer. He asked me to go to France to do some work. As soon as I got off the phone with my dealer I sent a text to my wife: “I am going to Paris.”

My wife is great. She is a cracker-jack lawyer in a public defender’s office in Brooklyn. We have been together for 19 years and she has always been right there with me through lots of ups and downs. I found it very interesting that I didn’t get a response to the text for almost four hours, though I admit it wasn’t a surprise.

These trips to France are always a tricky business. Over the past three years my career seems to be really happening over there — a lot of shows and visits. Still I am never comfortable there. I can’t speak French.

I’ve lived in Manhattan for almost all of my life. When you go to Paris, you realize right away that you are not in Kansas anymore. The French have a lot of rules. I don’t know half of them. I confided in my French dealer and explained that I was desperately trying to learn the language and the norms, but he told me, “Don’t bother. You will just ruin everything.”

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My wife would often tell me to go out and start smoking again, as she couldn’t bear to watch me fall to pieces.

When I have a show in Europe my anxiety level goes through the roof. I spend weeks preparing work in my studio in Brooklyn, then get involved in all of the logistics of getting them overseas, crating up elaborate projects into boxes and hoping everything makes over there in one piece. I am usually invited to go along and will often spend a week or two in a city where I don’t speak the language, working non-stop, all the while drinking and smoking at fever pitch to keep the energy level going.



When I return home I usually find myself looking to clean up a bit. It is during these times that I get to the gym and stop smoking and seem to keep my anxiety at a steady, low-level purr.

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I have always used substances to cope with my anxiety. At different moments in my life, I have become completely lost in food, drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. Sometimes it seemed that survival would have been impossible without them. But after five years in therapy I can now admit that I probably would have been fine without the substances. What really makes my anxiety go away is time and distance. But here's the thing: part of me doesn't want it to go away. I actually thrive on and revel in the heart pounding and discomfort, and I enjoy it even more when I am dumping booze or cigarettes on the fire that is burning in my heart and brain.

Of all the vices I have overindulged in, smoking is the only one I will admit has an addictive spell over me. Only cigarettes — or the lack of them — have changed my personality and taken my body and mind out of my own control. When I was younger and tried to quit, I had horrible physical responses to the nicotine deprivation. Tunnel vision, anxiety attacks, general numbness would take over my body. My wife would often tell me to go out and start smoking again, as she couldn't bear to watch me fall to pieces.

Since then, quitting has been a constant project with me. I quit all the time. But often, when I am overwhelmed with work, I find it almost impossible to not light up. I know, I know... It's an excuse. But when I am filled with anxiety I simply find it so much easier to feed the beast. Trying not to smoke takes way too much effort.

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I made it to France and back. But socializing — with dealers, gallery owners, collectors and other artists — is a big part of the job. I am often surrounded by drinks and drugs and cigarettes, and often indulge to move things along. Not the healthiest of lifestyles, I admit, but as far as my mental health goes, it is during these business trips that I am at my best.

When I returned I went to see my doctor for an annual visit. He was surprised and upset to find that I'd gone back to smoking. I told him that my problem is that I love to smoke and I know it is terrible for me, but whenever I find myself in the throes of a project quitting or staying quit seems to go right out the window.

As things have gone better and better for me in my career, the anxiety levels ratchet up faster and more often. It comes in waves: I become very introverted and detached. I have trouble dealing with people around me. I become controlling and passive at the same moment, stressing about minor details while often losing sight of the situation at hand. My heart races and everything seems to move super fast. I also become funny. I jab out of my shell using humor and jokes and non-sequiturs. Like a pressure valve letting off steam. When I am drinking or smoking, the edge seems to come off. I can

be more present. The jokes roll out easier and help establish a tone. I can be much less worried about controlling things and enjoy the moment with some fluidity.

But of course my doctor was concerned about my smoking and wanted to help. He told me about an antidepressant (Bupropion) that had an interesting side effect: it seemed to make cigarettes totally unpalatable. I had never taken antidepressants before. Even with all of the anxiety and stress I have in my life, depression has never been an issue. Whenever I do get into a downward cycle, I tend to work myself out of it very quickly. I like to joke that the reason I don't get mired in depression is because I have such a short attention span.

The doctor told me that the pills would make me not want to smoke, but there were side effects. On the one hand I might find myself feeling a certain spark in my life, an increase in energy and vitality. The antidepressant would be basically doing its stuff, same as it would for a depressed person. But there were possible side effects, like the remote chance that the drug would make me a bit suicidal. Well, since I tend to be an overwhelmingly undepressed person, I decided to take the drugs. Hopefully I'd quit smoking, and get that lift.

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Related [More From Anxiety](#)  
Read previous contributions to this series.

I was really excited about this fix-all. I was finally going to kick my smoking habit once and for all.

So I started to take the anti-depressant. My doctor told me it would take some time to ramp up in my body and that I should begin to take the pills, slowly getting up to three or so a day, while establishing a quit date for about seven days away.

I was feeling pretty great and for the first few days. I was in heaven, really. Taking what seemed to me were essentially uppers and smoking away all the while thinking I was doing something really good for my body and overall physical health. My quit day was still a couple of days away.

About the fourth or fifth day it all began to change. I lit up a cigarette and it had to be the most revolting feeling and taste that I had ever felt in my life. My whole body cringed. I felt like I had sewer water running through my veins. I tried again later with another cigarette and it was the same all over again. I was suddenly turned off to cigarettes, completely.

I was happy about this, disgusted by cigarettes and moving on, although I have to admit that I did feel a little ripped off having given up the smokes a day and a half prior to my "quit date." I didn't get the chance to say goodbye.

Not long after, though, something else changed. Biking home from work across the Williamsburg Bridge or riding the subway I'd start to have these horrible thoughts about what would happen if I threw myself in front of a train or down into the river. In the studio I was using power tools and thinking about cutting my hand off. It was really freaking me out. My mind was spinning out these very full, detailed and dark narratives, which I was simultaneously watching happen from another, walled off

perch in my brain.

One day I was coming home from work and my wife was out on Long Island and I sent her a text message saying that I wanted to kill myself. This time she responded right away. I had experienced plenty of stress and anxiety in my life, but I had never been down in such a deep and dark place. She called the next minute and directed me to see my doctor, who I found in his office that afternoon. He told me to stop taking the drugs immediately. It would take a week or so to get the residue out of my system. The experiment was over.

For the next five days or so I continued to feel much the same. A dark cloud hung over my head. The drug had not only made me feel horribly suicidal, but also had completely taken away my sense of humor. I was walking around in a deep funk and feeling very little relief. On the morning of the sixth day, though, I woke up feeling fantastic. I was back. My joy and spark had returned. Everything seemed to be getting back to normal. I went to my studio and started to work my way out of the terrible stuff that I had been making over the past couple of weeks of the experiment. I found an old pack of cigarettes lying around and I decided to have one to see if it would be as disgusting as the last. It was not.

The cigarette tasted just as good as all the others I'd had before taking the drugs. I laughed out loud to myself and thought, "No wonder I wanted to kill myself. I wasn't smoking!"

I had my sense of humor back. All was right again with the world. I could live with my anxiety, as long as I had my vices to help me through.

*David Kramer is a New York-based artist. His solo show, "American Exports," is currently at ESSI Cite Gallery in Angoulême, France. His work also appears in the group show "Cloud Nine" at The Front Room gallery in Brooklyn, through May 13. He is a 2011-12 Special Editions Fellow at the Lower Eastside Printshop in New York City.*



AIRES

## DAVID KRAMER : « LE DESSIN EST AU CENTRE DE TOUT »

PAR | Anaël Pigeat

« Le dessin est au centre de tout<sup>1</sup> », affirme David Kramer. L'œuvre de cet artiste américain est pourtant extrêmement diverse. Il travaille à New York depuis une vingtaine d'années, vit à deux pas du quartier des galeries, mais demeure peu connu aux États-Unis. « Je suis un conteur, un archiviste et un homme de divertissement<sup>2</sup> », écrit-il. Ses œuvres s'inspirent souvent de l'iconographie de la société de consommation américaine, des publicités des années 1970 ou des coupures de magazines. Kramer ironise sur la rivalité entre côte Est et côte Ouest ou sur diverses images de la réussite sociale. Il se moque aussi du monde de l'art, des critiques, des galeristes et des artistes. Formellement, son œuvre est à la fois sophistiquée et empreinte d'une certaine spontanéité. Le cœur de ses recherches se compose de travaux sur papier. Il utilise aussi d'autres supports – peinture, vidéo ou installations –, mais c'est du dessin que résultent tous ses choix artistiques.

### Des images et des mots

La plupart des dessins de David Kramer sont composés d'une image sur laquelle un texte est écrit en lettres capitales ; parfois c'est l'inverse et l'image surgit du texte. « Je n'écris pas une histoire, les choses viennent de manière organique. » Textes et dessins sont d'ailleurs souvent entremêlés, se recouvrant les uns les autres avec une certaine immédiateté. Lorsqu'il commence à écrire, il ne connaît pas toujours le chemin qu'il suivra pour conclure. Il considère un dessin achevé lorsqu'il en rit lui-même. Ses premières œuvres étaient abstraites, couvertes d'un mot ou deux, et faisaient référence à l'Action Painting. Progressivement, il a trouvé des images dans des magazines, puis en a fixé des morceaux sur une page, laissant visibles des traces de colle, comme les grands gestes d'un peintre. Des décolllements de papier forment un relief à la surface de la page dont il se réapproprie les fragments en y dessinant et y associant des bribes de textes. Kramer est aussi un coloriste remarquable. Assemblés



en contrastes dynamiques, ses bleus, ses verts ou ses rouges vifs véhiculent la séduction des images de papier glacé. À l'encre et au crayon, certains dessins sont réalisés sur des feuilles de papier coloré qui donnent à l'ensemble une tonalité particulière et permettent une utilisation ironique de la couleur. Un homme et sa compagne font de la barque sur du papier rose ; il est écrit : « 'Ils furent heureux et eurent beaucoup d'enfants' n'a jamais été la conclusion d'aucune de mes histoires<sup>3</sup> ».

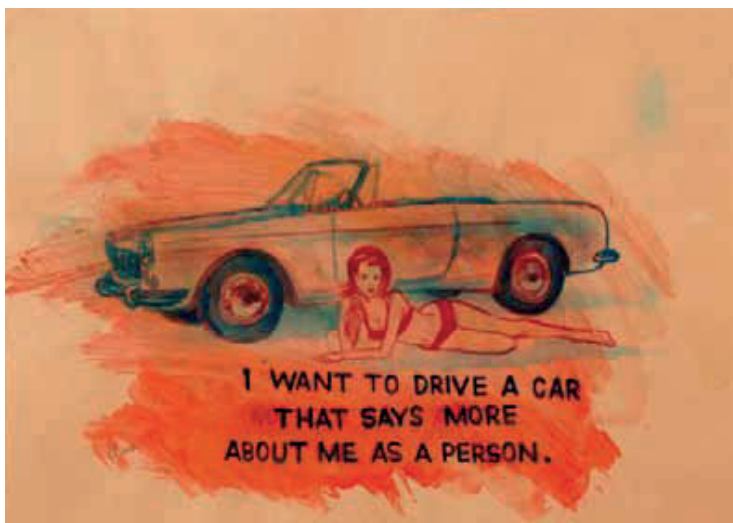
Un humour métaphysique règne sur les images de David Kramer. Nombre de ses sujets ont pour cible le rêve américain, les voitures à la carrosserie rutilante, l'alcool et le tabac, la fête. « Je veux conduire une voiture qui en dise plus sur moi en tant que personne », affirment plusieurs personnages<sup>4</sup>, tandis qu'un couple apparemment heureux trinque à une cause étonnante : « Je peux remercier l'alcool et l'argent pour les meilleurs moments

1. D. Kramer, dans un entretien téléphonique avec l'auteur, 17 avril 2011. Toutes les citations ou propos rapportés non référencés sont issus de cet entretien.

2. D. Kramer cité par Sarah Murkett, communiqué de presse de l'exposition *Untitled (Because I Am Not Richard Prince...)*, galerie Laurent Godin, 2010.

3. *Fairytail Ending* (2009).

4. *I Want To Drive A Car That Says More About Me As A Person* (2005) par exemple.



de ma vie<sup>5</sup> ». De manière plus spirituelle, des enseignes de motels farfelues indiquent : « Je suis là<sup>6</sup> », tandis qu'un Donald Duck humanisé s'exclame : « Je cherche un souvenir ou une expérience qui m'appartienne complètement<sup>7</sup> ». Figure de l'Amérique et de l'aventure, le cow-boy apparaît souvent. Tel un créateur solitaire, l'un d'entre eux, à cheval au milieu d'un troupeau, pense : « Je me considère comme un non-conformiste et un indépendant... même s'il n'est pas faux de dire que je n'ai jamais été assez intelligent pour lire le mode d'emploi<sup>8</sup> ». L'érotisme est aussi très présent avec des motifs de femmes nues, de scènes d'amour entre deux personnages ou d'orgies potentielles, qui sont fréquemment accompagnés de textes parfois coquins ou dont le contenu est plus existentiel que grivois.

Le monde de l'art est également un sujet inépuisable de dérision. Il s'intéresse aux artistes délaissés par la société et à ceux qui voudraient être des stars du rock'n'roll, regrettant que personne ne les reconnaisse dans la rue. Il rit aussi des artistes célèbres, d'Ed Ruscha à Richard Serra, sans toujours les nommer. « J'ai le plus grand respect pour Jeff Koons... et toutes les personnes très talentueuses qui travaillent pour lui<sup>9</sup> », est écrit en grand sur l'image d'un jeune homme aux bras chargés de ballons de baudruche. Une autre feuille est simplement composée d'un texte, sur fond de papier jaune : « Un jour mon galeriste m'a dit : "Je ne comprends pas, ton travail est formidable. C'est aussi bon que Richard Prince. Comment se fait-il que tu n'arrives pas à atteindre ses prix ?" Et j'ai répondu : "Parce que tu n'es pas Larry Gagosian<sup>10</sup>" » !

### La forme des mots

Rares sont les images de David Kramer sur lesquelles ne figurent pas quelques mots : l'écriture est partie intégrante de sa recherche plastique. Au-delà du contenu, la forme des mots est porteuse de sens. À ses débuts, il utilisait exclusivement

une vieille machine à écrire – qu'il emploie aujourd'hui moins systématiquement – pour l'immédiateté qu'elle permet, comme « une empreinte de l'instant » laissant déjà ses repentirs apparents. « J'écrivais comme si j'avais une mitrailleuse, aussi vite que je le pouvais », dit-il, faisant référence à Jack Kerouac et à ses rouleaux de papier noircis presque à l'infini. Cette rapidité de l'écriture, que l'on décèle aussi dans le geste vif et relâché du dessinateur, témoigne d'une profonde urgence de créer. Un petit paragraphe s'inscrit alors en haut d'une page, aligné sur la gauche, relatant un souvenir ou une fiction. C'est au contraire pour ralentir son écriture que Kramer a commencé à utiliser un pinceau, écrivant à la main, parsemant ses feuilles de ratures. Il note alors une phrase ou un simple commentaire ; certains que l'on retrouve d'une feuille à l'autre, retravaillés dans des contextes différents. Texte et dessin sont en général liés, mais un décalage apparaît parfois entre les mots et l'image. L'art de David Kramer réside dans le non-dit. De scènes de la vie quotidienne, il tire des considérations existentielles sur l'argent qui ne fait pas le bonheur, le temps qui passe, le succès ou la renommée. En ce sens, les nouvelles de Raymond Carver sont pour lui un modèle. En peinture, il s'inspire aussi des personnages perdus dans leurs pensées qu'Edward Hopper peint dans des lieux anonymes, ou encore des tableaux de Roy Lichtenstein qui évoquent des émotions profondes à travers de froides images de bandes dessinées. Le texte multicolore écrit à la main peut devenir l'unique image, dans une mise en page souvent symétrique. Les ratures créent un rythme particulier, comme les vibrations d'une partition musicale.

5. *Perfect Couple* (2011).

6. *Road Sign* (2006).

7. *Seen on TV* (2009).

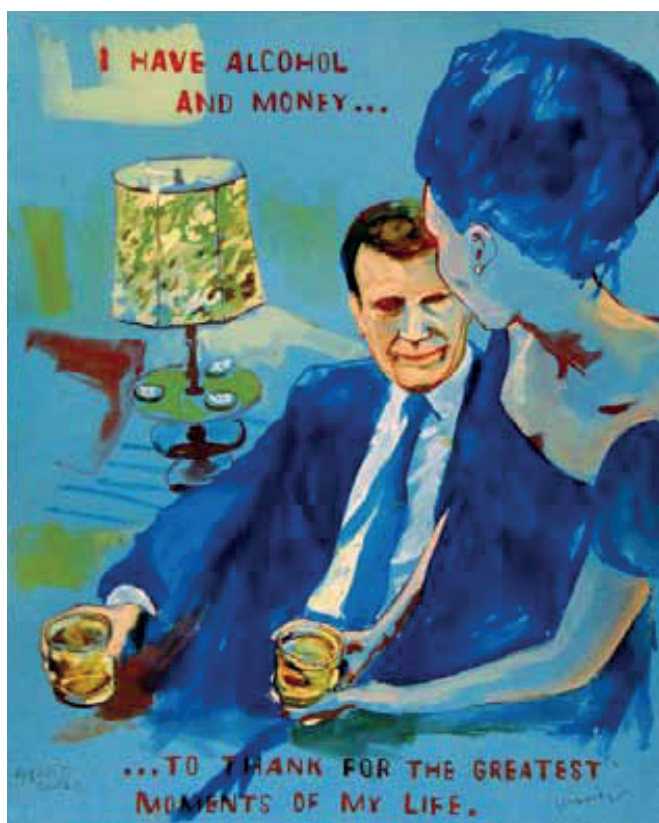
8. *Plane Misconception* (2011).

9. *Lousy Balloons* (2011).

10. *Untitled (Because I Am Not Richard Prince...)* (2010).

• *I Want To Drive A Car That Says More About Me As A Person*. 2006. Encre et crayon sur papier, 36 × 42 cm

• *Plane Misconception*. 2011. Encre sur papier, 64,77 × 49,53 cm



Bien que David Kramer utilise sa propre vie, ses névroses, sa position d'artiste comme matière de son œuvre, on ne sait jamais vraiment si son récit est réellement autobiographique. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas toujours l'artiste qui prend la parole, mais plutôt les personnages. Les mots ne sont pas inscrits dans des bulles de bande dessinée – cet univers lui est assez étranger –, mais flottent sur la page, comme s'ils dialoguaient avec le dessin, à la manière du « courant de conscience » chez Virginia Woolf... mâtiné d'humour juif new-yorkais, entre rire, tragédie et mélancolie.

### Performer l'écriture

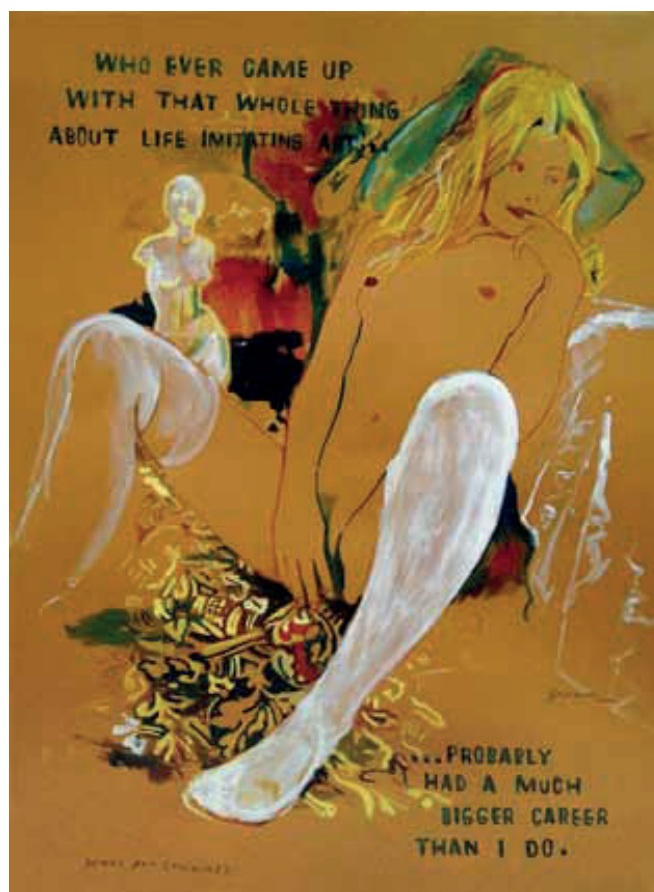
Animé par l'urgence qui le conduit à écrire et à dessiner, David Kramer a très naturellement commencé à utiliser le cinéma et la vidéo. Selon lui, les mots et les traits ne lui permettaient pas la même acuité que la caméra, dans la description des sentiments. Il a d'abord réalisé des performances au cours desquelles il lisait ses textes à haute voix, mais dont il restait insatisfait. Ses nouvelles images en mouvement forment une *écriture performée*, aussi spontanée que celle que l'on trouve dans ses dessins.

*Age Old Story* (2008) est ainsi devenu un film parce que le dessin n'exprimait pas assez la crudité d'une déception amicale entre artistes. Tourné en super-huit noir et blanc, ce petit film dont le scénario repose sur un souvenir s'inspire de Buster Keaton ou de Charlie Chaplin. Un passage reprend même la scène où Charlot fait danser des petits pains dans *La Ruée vers l'or*. Des cartons se succèdent entre les scènes comme les textes jouxtent les images et les accompagnent dans les dessins. D'une drôlerie cruelle, le film relate l'histoire d'un peintre maudit, d'un autre

artiste – ami de jeunesse du précédent – à qui la chance apporte la gloire, d'un critique en vue et d'une mécène des arts. Sous le comique des situations, les sentiments de trahison et de blessure sont brûlants.

De même, la vidéo *Asshole* (2002) exprime, avec une grande précision, le sentiment d'abattement mêlé de culpabilité qu'il y a à éprouver un désespoir personnel face à une tragédie nationale. Un artiste (lui-même) annonce la destruction accidentelle de son œuvre dans une lettre adressée à un musée où il doit exposer. Les mots défilent en banc-titre, là encore, le texte se mêle à l'image. Une femme (l'épouse de Kramer) se plaint des jérémiades de son mari et considère que cette histoire est un prétexte pour ne pas travailler. En réalité, un mois après le 11 septembre, l'atelier de David Kramer a été détruit par un incendie. Le spectateur ne connaît pas l'origine réelle de l'histoire, et l'artiste se joue ainsi encore de l'ambiguïté entre autobiographie et fiction.

D'autres films semblent tenir les mêmes propos que certains dessins. Par exemple, la vidéo *Method Acting* (2002) et le dessin *Super Familiar* (2011) comportent une même scène : un homme (David Kramer lui-même d'un côté et un personnage incarné







par un Superman de bande dessinée de l'autre) emploie des mots identiques pour annoncer à sa femme qu'il a eu une idée qui va changer leur vie. Comme dans les travaux sur papier, un sujet est retravaillé à plusieurs reprises. Ici, le dessin suit la vidéo, signe de ce que les deux médias sont pour David Kramer intimement entremêlés.

Le travail de David Kramer sur les décors ne se limite pas à des réalisations filmées. Il conçoit aussi des environnements – qui apparaissent ponctuellement dans des dessins –, comme pour « encadrer » ses images. À propos du mobilier en faux troncs d'arbres d'*Outsizing the Downsize : Big Log Seating Arrangement* (2009), il explique avec ironie qu'en dehors du fait que la sculpture l'a toujours intéressé, ces constructions lui permettent de posséder les meubles modernistes qu'il n'a jamais eu les moyens d'acheter. Il a aussi réalisé des murs de pierres apparentes... en papier mâché et aux couleurs impertinément vives, symbole détourné d'une certaine réussite sociale. Des canapés sont parfois installés devant une cheminée factice entourée de dessins, invitant le spectateur à s'asseoir. Les installations s'inscrivent dans la même veine. Un coussin qui reprend la forme de l'État de Californie sert de canapé pour contempler ses dessins, comme si Los Angeles regardait New York. Une installation datant de

2008 présente des bouteilles de bière vides posées à même le sol, éclairées par des néons formant les mots *Hi Life*<sup>11</sup>. Le dessin *Poolside* (2009)<sup>12</sup> traduit un état d'esprit similaire : « J'avais l'habitude de me plaindre, d'avoir l'impression qu'il y avait une grande fête à laquelle je ne serais jamais invité... Aujourd'hui j'espère seulement qu'elle n'est pas complètement finie », dit une baigneuse en bikini. C'est encore pour approcher l'esthétique publicitaire et la séduction qu'elle véhicule que David Kramer déploie des éclairages dans ses installations.

Les dessins de David Kramer constituent un journal au long cours de son existence, de ses réflexions sur la nature humaine, ses travers, mais aussi parfois ses qualités, sur les doutes et les angoisses d'un artiste new-yorkais du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle. Sous un humour corrosif, son travail dévoile une extrême sensibilité et une fragilité vibrante. Ses travaux aux formes multiples sont autant de dessins sortis de leur cadre.

David Kramer est né en 1963 à New York, où il vit et travaille. •

11. On peut traduire cette expression par un littéral « bonjour la vie », mais, en anglais, elle partage la sonorité de *high life*, ou « belle vie », qui est également une marque de bière [NdlÉ].

12. *Poolside*, 2009.



Print Article



David Kramer's *Snake Oil* (2008)



David Kramer  
*untitled*  
2008



David Kramer  
*Homeland Security*  
2008

## THINGS FALL APART by Charlie Finch

In the tradition of Kenneth Patchen's *Sleepers Awake* and Ray Johnson's *Snake*, David Kramer makes books that double as his art. Long dubbed "The Mayor of Williamsburg" by his fellow Brooklyn artists, Kramer combines sexy postcard paintings of lovers in cars, canoes and hot tubs with shaggy dog texts documenting his own true reality: disappointment and dashed hopes.

As Kramer puts it in his new book-artwork *Snake Oil*, "I am desperately trying to hang onto my romantic notion of life, but I am afraid that all that does is make me seem more and more creepy." The snake oil, the romantic promise of every Beatles hit and Sinatra croon, seeps through each hour of Kramer's desperate middle age, not just his love life.

In one of the book's texts, an artist friend comes to New York, tries to make it big, and fails, then tells Kramer, "New York decided it doesn't want US. WE took our best shot, but it wasn't what they wanted."

To which Kramer replies, "Hey, don't include ME in your stupid synopsis. I like it here. I was born here. Go home! Take your stupid ball with you!"

In another of *Snake Oil's* vignettes, Kramer tries to get his dyslexic son into a special school. He sits down with the school's admissions officer. Trying to make an analogy about adapting, she tells Kramer, "Let's say you are an artist who paints landscapes with blue skies. Someone comes to your studio and says, 'If you paint purple skies, I can sell your painting and the buyer will tell his friends who will also buy purple sky paintings'." Kramer remarks, "I told this woman I was, in fact, an artist and I would tell that person to get the fuck out of my studio."

Then he continues, "I surprised myself. The truth is that I would grow a ponytail if a curator would put me in a particular show. All I really succeeded in was getting my son rejected at a school I couldn't afford to send him to anyway."

Kramer's images, a gun and a bottle of Jack Daniels labeled "Homeland Security," the artist in a flannel shirt wielding an axe, lovers snuggling at the drive-in, reek of the bleeding colors you see in the paintings of Stephen Lack, Kathe Burckhardt and Richard Prince. I never get tired of this style, entropy in paint with a neurotic twist, and Kramer is one of its better practitioners.

Also, looking in the mirror, I see the worldviews of Kramer and myself merging on that boathouse over the River Styx. Should you empathize, tattered dreamer, order *Snake Oil* at [dkramer5000@juno.com](mailto:dkramer5000@juno.com).

**CHARLIE FINCH** is co-author of *Most Art Sucks: Five Years of Coagula* (Smart Art Press).