

# Jason Gringler

09.07

STUDIO VISIT

If you had imagined an artist studio as a messy place, Jason Gringler certainly proves you wrong. His small but sleek studio is located in Berlin Neukölln, opposite to the techno haven *Griessmühle*. The complex is full of rehearsal studios, queer party locations and DIY car workshops. There, at the end of the alley, we find Jason's studio.

It is a sunny day and his white-walled studio is completely covered with a bright and unpolluted light. At first sight, the room looks more like a gallery space: the entrance is almost empty except for two large finished pieces hanging on the wall. From time to time Jason likes to exchange them to figure out how they react to light and the environment they are part of: And without any doubts, the space gives them enough room to breathe, so the viewer has the possibility to enjoy them without any distraction.

Outside, in front of the studio, we find parts of a new piece drying in the sun: Jason just poured some concrete into a metal framework—the very basis of a new body of works. Inside it is as tidy as if Marie Kondo just swept through, throwing away everything that doesn't spark joy.

Nevertheless, the material collection of Gringler really does spark joy and pleasure: There is a variety of mirrors and metal-pieces, both new and shiny, scratched and used. It is a striking balance between what has just been delivered to the studio, and what has been used multiple times in pieces that in the end did not work out as planned.

We open a beer and Jason starts talking about how it is to grow up in Canada and to move to New York later, but also about his experience so far in Berlin—remarking the city's different pace. His output is certainly impressive and not matching Berlin's dead-slow art scene at all. However, at the same time, this *laissez-faire* attitude takes away some pressure to produce and to create non-stop, and to conform, too.

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JASON, THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND THE INVITATION TO YOUR STUDIO. LET'S START WITH SOMETHING EASY: TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR BEGINNINGS OF BEING AN ARTIST. WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO ART?

I grew up in a Toronto neighborhood predominantly inhabited by eastern European immigrants. My family has eastern European roots which can give some clarity as to why my parents still live in the same house on the same street, although, to be honest, I have never asked them. Perhaps a minor detail, but for me it is worth noting, the possibility of becoming an artist did not exist. This possibility was something I discovered largely by accident as a lost teenager drowning myself in substances and melancholia. At the risk of categorizing myself as a cliché, the substances opened many doors—positive and negative. The positive, of course, was slowly finding my way toward becoming an artist.

A COMMON THING IN ART IS THAT OTHERS—CURATORS, ART CRITICS, GALLERISTS—DESCRIBE AN ARTIST'S WORK. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK IN YOUR OWN WORDS?

In some ways, the driving force behind my work is failure. Allow me to elaborate: I have a strong interest in painting and its history, although painting is not something I have a natural proclivity towards. I spent many years experimenting with the pitfalls of my hands attempting to maneuver pigment successfully, but the results were mostly disastrous. As a consequence, stubborn as I am, instead of giving up the genre, I changed the materials. My work relies heavily on labor and formal material experimentation while engaging with urban architecture, spatial perception, destruction, recycling and decay.

YOU LIVED IN NEW YORK FOR ROUGHLY TEN YEARS, MOVED TO BERLIN A WHILE AGO. WE'RE IN YOUR STUDIO AND IT'S A RATHER INTERESTING LOCATION—ALMOST EMPTY, COVERED IN LIGHT, AT THE END OF A ROAD. ALMOST POETIC OR SACRAL. WOULDN'T THERE BE ALL THESE HEAVY TOOLS HERE. WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR YOU IN YOUR STUDIO?

I lived in NYC for ten years nearly to the day (my departure date was a coincidence). Something of interest that I learned in New York is that *limitations* are the most important tools I have to utilize within my studio practice. As well, I am quite sensitive to space. What I mean is that space informs my work. The studio architecture and surrounding neighborhood will always make appearances in the art/objects I produce. I like to be active in the studio. I am extremely organized and prefer the studio to be station-based. This way I am on my feet while working. I keep the studio as pared down as possible. Outside of having tools and materials for production, I just recently acquired a chair that sits in the corner. I try to streamline the studio so that my entire focus while at work is only the work. A white floor, white furniture and white walls help me to accentuate my focus.

A RECURRING THEME—OR MAYBE EVEN THE OVERARCHING ONE—IN YOUR WORKS IS DESTRUCTION. WHERE DOES THAT COME FROM?

Destruction is something I have come to understand as a necessity. The straightforward answer is that 50% of my output is unsuccessful, so the logical part of my brain translates my unsuccessful attempts at production back in to *raw* material. Working this way gives me a set limitation for the next piece but simultaneously this methodology gives the next work a defined *beginning* structure as well. Bear with me here, but destruction also has an interesting conversation with painting and gestural mark-making. The act of destroying an object achieves more than the destruction of said object. Destruction has repercussions, and those repercussions interest me as a stand-in for unmannered (or possibly painted) gestures. The victim's corpse appears to reveal the history of its murder.

RECYCLING AND REPURPOSING MATERIALS (OR FAILED WORKS) IS A BIG PART OF YOUR WORK. IN ART, AS WELL AS THE ENTIRE CREATIVE SECTOR IN

GENERAL, WE ARE USED TO STRIVING FOR NEWNESS. WHAT MADE YOU START THIS QUITE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH OF REUSING MATERIALS?

Technically, my work is not sustainable (unfortunately), although sustainability is a hyperrelevant subject in 2019. I do recycle materials whenever possible. However, I buy the majority of acrylic glass, concrete, epoxy, mirror and steel first hand. A circle of use does occur once the initial investment has been made. I will say that outside of my studio I live minimally with very few objects and with little product consumption. When it comes to my work, I do not sacrifice. It is fortuitous that my practice has evolved to incorporate recycling and the reuse of my materials. Here, I can elaborate with two examples from two different bodies of work.

First, the glass *paintings*: Typically, this body of work consists of layered acrylic glass, glass, UV epoxy resin, steel, sign vinyl, spray enamel and collage. There are two adhesives I use when bonding acrylic glass. One adhesive is a *water-like* chemical that fuses two parts of acrylic glass within a few seconds—essentially it melts the surfaces together. If I make an error (as noted earlier, I tend to make errors), at a certain point the work is destroyed. Unlike, let's say, a painting, I cannot scrape down the surface or overpaint it unless I want to lose all translucent properties of the glass. Once the *failed* work is destroyed, I consider pieces for reuse. And when I reuse parts, those parts come with the history of their destruction thus adding a narrative and foundation for new beginnings.

Second, the steel, glass and concrete *paintings*: I began this series in Berlin under environmental circumstances. My studio is unheated. The winter months are tolerable aside from January and February. Certain materials become useless in the cold so I had to find replacements. I realized that I am surrounded by concrete within this industrial part of Berlin. Concrete *cures* rather than dries. The cold does not have much impact on the material (as far as I can tell). These pieces relate a bit more to sustainability because I use the concrete to embalm parts of other works that have been cut up and saved for reconsideration. When the concrete works are deemed unsuccessful, I bash out the concrete and cut up the steel and glass portions for reuse, again, allowing for the history of destruction to travel into my future output.

REGARDING YOUR *EBAY* SCULPTURE SERIES, MADE OF SECOND-HAND IPHONES AND MACBOOKS: WE ARE FOND OF READYMADES IN GENERAL, BUT YOU ARE ADDING THE ELEMENT OF DESTRUCTION TO THEM, GIVING THEM A TWIST AND—AT LEAST IT SEEMS TO US—ACTUALLY COMMENTING ON THEIR ORIGINAL USE (OR WHAT THEY, AS OBJECTS AND SYMBOLS, STAND FOR). THERE'S MUCH MORE GOING ON THAN JUST PLACING THE OBJECT IN A GALLERY OR ART CONTEXT, YOU'RE ACTUALLY USING THEM AS A RAW MATERIAL. WHAT IS THE PROCESS LIKE?

I began experimenting with the *eBay* sculptures in late 2015 (the majority of them were destroyed when I moved to Berlin). I was thinking about parallels between the screen and the glass *paintings* I was producing at the time. I was looking at art with increasing frequency on my phone—an

industrially produced object that is bought, used, sold, or thrown away, yet my work is fabricated by hand, it is labor-intensive and time-consuming. I was hunting for a way to explore the readymade object with slight augmentation that still retained the multi-layered materiality of my glass *paintings*. Using expired technology seemed like an obvious choice as the materials are a composite of similar industrial ingredients I find myself using in the studio. As tech is designed to render itself obsolete, there is a plethora of supply on eBay at all times. And since I had already linked my work to the screen, it made sense to attempt to produce sculpture using the screen and its technological brethren.

Fast forward to Berlin in 2019. I began purchasing objects from eBay.de quite recently and with similar intention. I decided to align the *eBay* sculptures with the regimented formalism of 1970's minimalism in that I decided only to use white Macbooks from a specific period (and there are thousands on eBay) in order to have a cohesiveness and seriality to the sculptural investigations. A second rule is that I allow myself only one destructive gesture using only one Macbook. The seriality is a direct reference to Donald Judd, while compositionally I am referencing Richard Nonas' wall sculptures. The Macbook pieces are hermetically sealed in recycled acrylic glass from offcuts of other production. The glass is bonded with adhesive and sanded, so the majority of seams are removed. The utilitarian object is defaced, defiled, and repackaged to be presented as sculpture.

IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO THINK ABOUT THE NOTION OF REFLECTION WHILE VIEWING YOUR WORK. REFLECTION DENOTES BOTH THE OCCURRENCE OF A VISUAL LIKENESS AND THE ACT OF MENTAL CONTEMPLATION. THESE TERMS LOCATE THE CONGRUITY BETWEEN SEEING AND THINKING. WHAT DOES REFLECTION MEAN TO YOU? WHICH EFFECT DO YOU WANT TO TRIGGER ON THE BEHOLDER?

Reflective media gives numerous lives to the objects I produce depending on one's own narrative as well as one's physical positioning in front of my work. The mirror acts simultaneously as a barrier, a window, and almost as a cinematic space. When I move, the light changes thus the work changes. It is a simple tactic to allow for kinetic experience with static objects. Architecture has a profound effect on my work (steel, glass, concrete, etc.) and reflective material is a somewhat manipulative tool to allow for my work to align itself with the architectural space where it is situated, and thus allowing me to consider the work as something that is in a state of continual change.

DO YOU HAVE A FETISH? MAYBE ONE CONNECTED TO YOUR PRACTICE?

Of course. I cannot determine if my material fetish developed out of *necessity* or from *exposure*. The *necessity* aspect revealed itself to me early on as a youth holding an impotent paintbrush. *Exposure* is a more interesting story: In 2007 I paid a friend of my parents \$300 to stuff my belongings under the seats of his minivan and drop me off in Brooklyn. I had taken the bus from Toronto to New York two weeks prior to secure

a workspace for myself. I had no friends or colleagues in New York back then and to be honest, I did not have much reason to be there. In retrospect, I can say that I was seeking to expose myself to contemporary art and the geographic-cultural fabric of a then ungentrified Bushwick, Brooklyn (lack of economic means is the honest reason I lived in that industrial wasteland). Bushwick was quite rough where I landed—mostly factories (some functioning, some crumbling) and warehouses.

I spent most of my time alone for approximately 4 years. I consumed the city visually. My neighborhood supplied the language I use in my work to this day. Steel, glass, concrete, mesh, decay, industry, and a general dystopian aesthetic sensibility tattooed my consciousness. I worked tirelessly and the fetishization of construction type materials increased. I do not inject my work with politics, but materials tend to have a life of their own. Barred windows, locked gates, and boarded-up doorways suggest protection, prison, and isolation. Warehouse windows became points of light and accessibility. My intention was to live in New York for one year, but as mentioned earlier, I remained for ten (legally after the first year—things did get better eventually). I did not like living in New York, but I felt the conceptual and formal value it brought to my work. New York also provided an entry point for the exhibition of my work in Europe beginning in December 2008 (and of course unknown to me at the time, my eventual move to Berlin in 2017).

YOU ARE NOT ONLY AN ARTIST BUT ALSO HEAD BEHIND THE INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT @WORK2DAY, POSTING WORKS OF OTHERS, EITHER SINGULAR OR IN SMALL COLLECTIONS—IN SUCH A SUCCESSFUL WAY THAT IT'S NOT EXAGGERATED SAYING @WORK2DAY WAS ONE OF THE FIRST OF THIS NEW KIND OF INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS THAT ARE OPERATING SIMILAR TO TUMBLR PROFILES YEARS AGO. HOW DID IT ALL START AND WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION BEHIND POSTING THE WORKS OF OTHER ARTISTS?

I started @work2day four years ago anonymously as a mini anthropological study. My German gallerist had just retired (I suddenly found myself without gallery representation for the first time in 8 years). I remember thinking about existing power structures within the art world; specifically, that I had little power to initiate dialogue with individuals outside my circle of artist colleagues. The account grew in popularity quite quickly. I decided from the outset that the works I place on Instagram will be stemming from interests I have in my studio practice, in particular, work that utilizes destructive strategies mainly focused on sculpture. Much of the work I posted had little or no presence on Instagram. I recall receiving encouragement from galleries and collectors via direct messages.

This is where the *anthropological* part comes in to play: Gallerists would ask me 'Are you a collector? You have such good taste.' Artists would submit to the account repeatedly with the assumption that I had something to offer them. People projected on to my anonymous art blog whatever it was that they were seeking. I maintained my silence. The first work I was asked to source was a turquoise Anish Kapoor (which I found) but the collector did not come through on the acquisition. I have no cre-

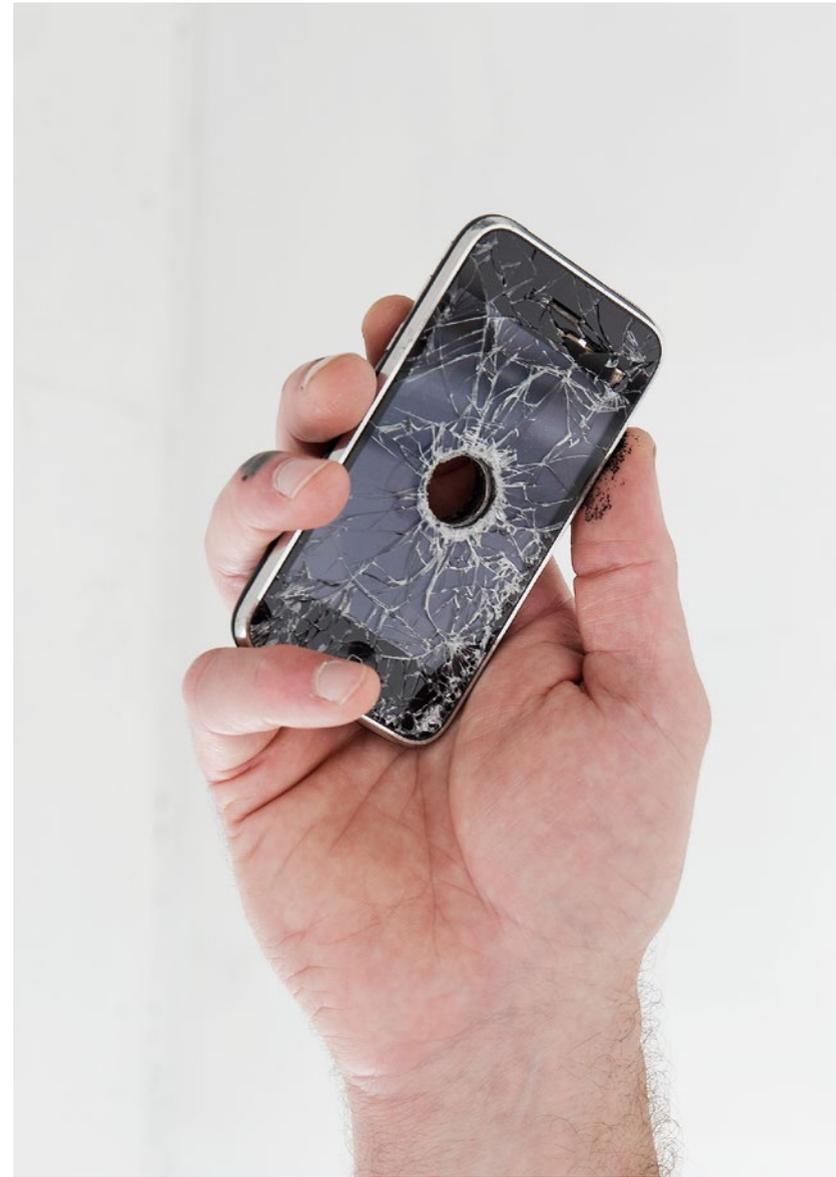
dentials as a curator or advisor but I have studied a gluttonous amount of contemporary art. Once the account hit 10,000 followers, I attached my name to the blog, thus putting an end to my anthropological study as well as completely transforming the demographic of people interested in the account. The account still continues to grow. I have made a number of good friends from @work2day and I am also actively sourcing works for collectors as a result of the vast network I have built online. The blog has rarely translated into any interest in me personally or professionally as an artist.

THANK YOU SO MUCH JASON!











Jason Gringler 09.001  
Leaning Workbench (T)  
2016



09.002 Jason Gringler  
Steel/Mesh (1)  
2016