

INTERVIEWS

Fuck You, Art World! An Interview with an Irreverent Performance Art Duo

by Samuel Rowlett on December 12, 2012

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Jennifer Catron and Paul Outlaw (All photos courtesy of Hibbard Nash unless noted)

During the first scene of Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the two main characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cross paths with a traveling band of actors who are in their own words "at the very point of decadence." These players, with their penchant for bawdy audience "participation" discuss their repertoire thusly:

ROSENCRANTZ: What is your Line?

PLAYER: Tragedy, sir. Deaths and disclosures, universal and particular, denouements both unexpected and inexorable, transvestite melodrama on all levels including the suggestive. We transport you to a world of intrigue and illusion... Clowns, if you like, murderers — we can do you ghosts and battles, on the skirmish level, heroes, villains, tormented lovers — set pieces in the poetic vein; we can do you rapiers or rape, or both, by all means, faithless wives and ravished virgins — flagrante delicto at a price...

ROSENCRANTZ: Well, I don't know...

PLAYER: It costs little to watch, and little more if you happen to get caught up in the action, if that's your taste, and times being what they

are.

ROSENCRANTZ: What are they?

PLAYER: Indifferent.

ROSENCRANTZ: Bad?

PLAYER: Wicked. Now what precisely is your pleasure?

Perhaps it is the players' virtuosic skill set, their willingness to provoke and pleasure their audience at any cost, to cross the line, to blur the seam between artist and viewer. Now, I'm not saying that artists Jennifer Catron and Paul Outlaw would go so far as "flagrante delicto," but I am pretty certain their audience will get caught up in the action.

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Catron and Outlaw's Fish Fry Truck (image courtesy Gothamist)

This past summer, they were champions (triumphing over the likes of Tom Sachs and Dustin Yellin) in Creative Time's Sand Castle Building Competition, with their life-sized, live-action human (with real spitting) sandcastle fountain. So, what are they up to now? This weekend at Allegra LaViola Gallery on the Lower East Side they will be scantily clad, strapped to a giant wheel, and repeatedly dipped in a vat of liquid gold. Of course!

He's a portion of my recent conversation with Ms. Catron and Mr. Outlaw about the art world, food pyramids, debauchery, and other sacrilegious topics.

Samuel Rowlett: Okay, picture that you are stranded on a desert island. You have plenty of cured Italian meat that is illegal in the U.S. and a Bedazzler. I ask you this: If you could each bring only one more thing with you what would it be? And why?

Paul Outlaw: Well, sounds like all we're missing is the liquor! So, of course I would bring the still.

Jennifer Catron: And I would bring the corn.

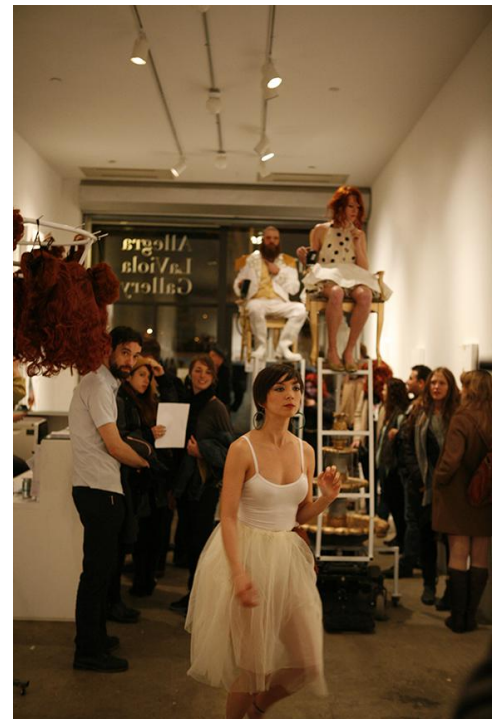
PO: Hey, teach a man to fish ... What more could anyone really ask for in life besides bedazzled alcohol soaked Italian cured meats? Desert Island or not, that sounds like a party!

JC: And a much needed and well-deserved vacation.

SR: CAGED DEATH MATCH! You, Jennifer Catron and Paul Outlaw, versus the artist collaborators of your choosing! Which collaborators would you pick and why? They can be living or dead. So call it: How is this shit going to go down?

JC: Obviously, it would be William Powhida and his much cooler stand-in versus Paul and I. People have been trying to make that happen for years now. I would take on Powhida in a battle of wit, performance, and good looks. Powhida would start whining about the unfairness of the art world even though he most likely makes more money than I, and will bring up the fact he lives in Bushwick to prove he's still "hip." He would clearly win the battle of "the art world sucks." But then I would come back with a performance extravaganza that definitively beats any of his few meager attempts. We would probably tie on good looks, even though I have an edge on style.

PO: And during this commotion I'm sure that his alter ego and I would quickly grow bored of the shenanigans of what was supposed to be a "Cage Death Match" and retire to the bar where we would see who could drink the most shots while throwing insults to all the girls before ignoring them completely. We would then leave the bar singing with our arms around each other before we vomit on the street and pass out in the gutter wallowing in



Jennifer Catron and Paul Outlaw

<http://hyperallergic.com/61889/fuck-you-art-world-interview-catron-outlaw/>

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our own self loathing a disdain for everyone else in our profession, also ending in a tie.

SR: Speaking of “wallowing,” let’s talk about debauchery. I think debauchery has had a bad rap since, say, biblical times; but before that, folks like the Greeks were all over it! So, given that we’re in a recession, and Greece and most of the world is like, “Dude, this austerity sucks, bro!” If you were President and First Gentleman, what would be your economic strategy to avoid the fiscal cliff?

PO: I’ve got this one! I have been planning this one for years. A very simple strategy. We replace all money with calories. I’ll give you a second to digest... Now, here is the brilliance. What is the purpose of money? To provide a universally understood system of value. What is universally needed for survival? Calories!



Jennifer Catron and Paul Outlaw



Jennifer Catron and Paul Outlaw

Instead of paying people with money, you pay them with a calorie allowance. You buy everything based on its calorie count. Apples are cheaper than candy bars because they have less calories. Only rich people can afford the high calorie stuff, so poor people will actually be healthier. Two birds one stone! This is brilliant. Think of the changes we will make. This is revolution!

JC: Obviously I would be President and Paul would be First Gentleman because that is the dumbest idea ever. All the greats have used debauchery for change. Listen, we’ve known since kindergarten that the best way to get someone to change is to make fun of them. We should just keep making fun of rich people until they give us all their money.

SR: Speaking of calories, you often integrate foodstuffs into your work. If you could design your ideal food pyramid chart, one that would hang in every cafeteria of every school and governmental building in the country, what would it look like?

PO: Pyramid. Very lopsided. The top of the pyramid is actually the big end and it consists of meat. Juicy, delicious, sweet, smelly meat. Followed by the potato group sitting right next to the mac-n-cheese group, rounded off at the bottom with the pie and ice cream group. There are also probably a couple of satellite groups floating around the outside edges that are comprised of raw seafood and a soup group made of gumbo and chili. For healthy options.

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Artist Mike Ellyson as Paul Outlaw in the midst of a performance

JC: Pyramids are incredibly boring. I would make a food chart Giuseppe Arcimboldo style. It would be exciting, and it is proven successful! Paul is much more likely to eat vegetables if they are shaped into a hilarious Arcimboldo head.

SR: Imagine that the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan has commissioned you to put on a reenactment of da Vinci's "The Last Supper." Who would play the role of Jesus? Most importantly, what's for supper?

JC: We would probably make Jesus into the Grand Trifecta of Talent: Me, Paul Outlaw, and Napoleon Bonaparte. Three of the greatest innovators of the post-Jesus world. We would sit at a table being pulled by

hybrid creatures through Milan, sharing the world's longest spaghetti noodle! World records of spaghetti.

PO: Jesus loves spaghetti!

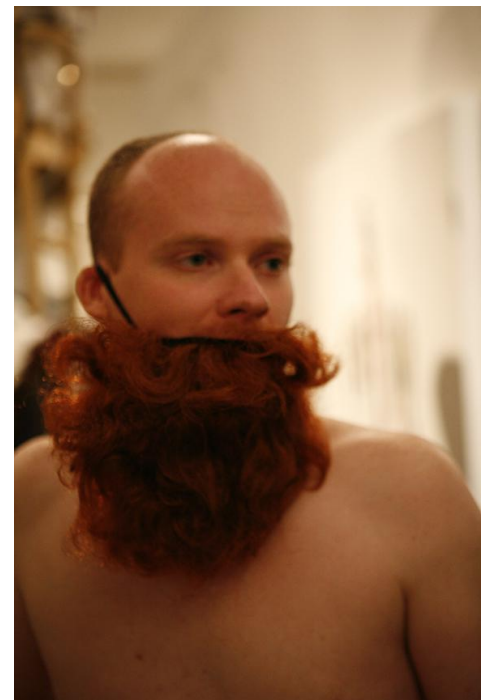
SR: There has been a lot of talk lately about art critics and criticism. Recently, the New York Times asked you what you thought. I had a follow-up question. Who came first, the artist or the critic?

PO: Oh, critics came first for sure. Before anybody was drawing pictures on any cave walls, somebody was criticizing the rock soup they had for dinner and the animal skin clothes they were wearing. Everybody's a critic in some form or another. But hey, if nobody was pointing out how something was done wrong, everyone would just keep on doing things the wrong way and we would never make any progress. I mean, this isn't little league. Everybody doesn't get a trophy. Somebody's gotta keep the rest of us in line.

JC: Immediately after the first artist drew a poor picture of a horse, someone had the nerve to point out that it actually looks more like a culturally irrelevant hyena, and thus it began.

SR: Some have referred to you guys as "artistic and romantic partners." How did that happen? We need something racy for this interview!

JC: We both started doing performance work in grad school, and we began to talk to each other about our artwork. Eventually, there was no way to complete our own work without stealing each other's ideas. It was never really a conscious decision, neither of us could remember whose idea was who's anymore. Then the magic all happened after we moved



Artist Mike Ellyson as Paul Outlaw

to NYC when we decided to build a Fish Fry Truck. From then on, it just worked.

PO: Jen was tired of seeing me get all the lady attention, so one day she sat in my lap and never left. It's hard to make your own individual projects with someone sitting in your lap. So, that's when we began collaborating. One artist in another artist's lap. That, I believe, is how it usually happens. It's actually worked. Jen is sitting in my lap right now.

SR: Do you have any advice for young artists trying to make it in the art world?

JC: Work really, really hard. Go to openings, meet people in the art world, make them recognize you. Then any small show you have, make it count. Take a huge risk, spend money you don't have. Invite important people. Eventually, they will come.

PO: Don't worry about selling your work. Worry about people knowing who you are and what you do. Be seen. Nobody's going to know you if they don't see you. It's a chess game whether you like it or not.

SR: Do you have any advice for old artists who have already made it in the art world?

JC: Don't be lame and make boring work when you are old and successful. But hey, they've already made it. So maybe it's their way of retiring. Who am I to judge?

PO: Like they would listen to me.

SR: You have an upcoming performance in conjunction with your show Super Supra Diluvian at Allegra LaViola Gallery. I heard there will be a giant bird, a wheel, skimpy outfits and glistening flesh. Should I bring dollar bills?

JC: Of course. This is how we generate most our profits. We know how to put on a show.

PO: Also quarters! Most of our show operates on one or two of those. Hey, art's not free.

SR: Finally, would you like to ask each other anything?

PO: No way. Jen tells me all the answers without me even asking.

JC: Absolutely not. I already know all of the answers to any questions I might want to ask Paul.



Art critic Jerry Saltz as Jennifer Catron (Photo courtesy Allegra LaViola)