

ARTIST Q&A

PART 2 OF 3

Philadelphia-based artists Colette Fu, Claes Gabriel, and Hiro Sakaguchi share their thoughts and experiences as they continue to make artwork during the uniquely challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic.



COLETTE FU



CLAES GABRIEL



HIRO SAKAGUCHI

TRACING ORIGINS

ROWAN UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY



CLAES GABRIEL

What are the biggest changes you've seen in the arts over the past decade, and how have these changes influenced your work?

I've seen artists become really clever in use of materials and doing things that are unexpected. I think expressing identity issues in an overt political way is playing a bigger role than ever. Here, I'm thinking about work like Hennessee Youngman's video where he talks about what it means to draw a flower. What's the difference between a white man drawing a flower and a black man? Some people think that as a Haitian American I should be making work about being Haitian.

What do you want viewers to take away from your art?

I want the work to evoke—like Rothko wanted to express a spiritual quality in his paintings. I want to bring simplicity, beauty, and conceptualism all together, I want the work to evoke something inside of the viewer. I think spirituality can be a scary topic for artists sometimes. They don't want to go there, to deal with it. I've always been inspired by Kandinsky's book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

How are you staying creative through COVID-19?

To be frank, people buying artwork. There's an overwhelming desire for artists to be supported right now. I'm making work, even though I don't have a place to show it. I'm working smaller so that it's possible to sell pieces. This crisis is really making me think that I don't want to pull any punches right now. Each piece could be my last piece, and that gives me immediacy, focus, and drive.



Image of artwork courtesy of Claes Gabriel, 2020



Studio image courtesy of Claes Gabriel

Where are you finding inspiration right now?

Everywhere! In spring and fall it's easy to find inspiration in colors of the seasons. My palette changes with the seasons too. I like looking at cars because the metallic colors are so varied. When Henry Ford was producing cars, there was only one color option available. Now there's huge diversity in color. I'm pulling colors from observations in my environment. I see a car that's a particular metallic cobalt blue and I run back to the studio and try to recreate it. That can be a really interesting challenge.

What is your favorite aspect of the arts community in Philadelphia?

I like how laid back it is, compared to New York. Artists are willing to work with each other, support each other, look out for each other. I'm not sure you'd get that in NY or LA. We all know each other. Small cities like this are where you make good art because you have more time and space to do it. It's accessible to artists trying to make it. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else than Philly.

CLAESGABRIEL.COM



Studio image courtesy of Claes Gabriel