



Lionel Cruet is a young artist of Puerto Rican descent who lives in New York City. His work <http://www.lionelcruet.com/> is computer-based and quite conceptual. I wanted to find out what inspires him to create. Here's our cool chat...

MICHAEL: Hey Lionel! First of all, I must congratulate you on something. I've already written an essay on this topic that I haven't published yet, but because of you I will alter it a bit using you as the example and post it soon. In your online statement (artist statement), you speak in your own voice rather than in the "third person," which I hate. I know that it's considered professional and standard, but I think it creates unnecessary distance between the artist and the audience. Why did you do this?

LIONEL: Thanks! I believe that the artist's statement supplements a conversation. If you're talking as an artist, you have to communicate using your own voice and describe your practice and process. I believe that it's responsible and active to talk as an artist self rather than an outsider.

MICHAEL: Absolutely. How else can you relate to your audience? Anyway, the work that you're doing right now seems to be focused on sky, air, flight, floating, ocean, etc. I associate these things (Miami Beach!) with transcendence and being able to soar past our human limitations. What was the inspiration for you?

LIONEL: As humans we should conserve oral communication and language; technology is changing fast. Probably in the near future, our communication will be reduced to other structures of language different from what we recognize now.

Yes, right now, I'm working with imagery and elements that relate to the natural environment and the human presence in it. I'm from San Juan, Puerto Rico and my connection with the Caribbean nature has allowed me to have a variety of inspirations: coastal areas, mesmerizing dawns, comfortable temperatures and a persistent tension caused by uncertainties, opposing forces and chaos.

The Caribbean Islands often are perceived by their physical and natural beauty. Being immersed in this environment has led me to understand multiple layers; interpreting the complexity of how the physical environment resonates with human consciousness and perception.

MICHAEL: Are you trying to capture these environmental things in a certain way because they're endangered? Also, do you think technology is changing our ways of communicating for better or worse?

LIONEL: It's more like finding the relationship between order and chaos or chaos in order; also like packing and being ready before the storm. It's to keep the reminiscent, to organize the intangible and the sublime; learning of our presence and existence.

I know technology is transforming the channels of communication and the ways to speed or increase effective communication. What might be better or worse is the implementation of these models. Nothing is better or worse. It's the process of existence and evolution.

MICHAEL: Interesting. I see that you work in various mediums. Do you consider yourself a photographic or mixed-media artist? How do you decide which medium you'll use?

LIONEL: I prefer to give more importance to the ideas and the reasons rather than mediums. The ideas dictate the mediums to use. A major part of my process is constructed and assembled through a computer and the computer happens to create a form of balance between the idea and the physical world. The machine does not dictate the nature of the work; it is a tool of control of the works' existence.

MICHAEL: Do you come from a family of artists? What was your first experience with art? Why did you become an artist? So many artists are struggling. It's not too late for you to get your MBA.

LIONEL: No, not at all. Middle working class, my family comes from the field of social work, and pedagogy. My first experience with art was when I was a child and understanding comprehension skills. That question is impossible to answer. I guess

you have to ask all the good people who surround me every day. I believe they know better. I appreciate the concern, but "the artist" term is too vague and I'm not "the artist" that is struggling. Actually, I'm really grateful to be busy with lots of appointments. What would be really helpful is if someone knows how to stretch minutes and hours of a day and share that secret, I'd appreciate.

MICHAEL: What is Puerto Rico like? How did growing up there inspire you to become an artist? Is there a strong art community there?

LIONEL: Puerto Rico is an interesting place politically, economically, historically and geographically. I wouldn't say it's better or worse than other countries. I just happen to admire elements of culture, traditions and the natural cycles that happen to be really interesting. There's definitely a strong community involved in arts and culture doing their best with what they have.

MICHAEL: When you wake up in the morning, what inspires you to create? Where do you find inspiration? What role does art play in your life? In other words, why is art so important?

LIONEL: When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I do is open my computer and go over my email and read online articles and news on topics such as society, science and technology, culture and art. Most of the time, these references serve as a point of inspiration. I'm really interested in a process of investigation, research-based art. Plus it's always good to keep informed about what's happening locally and globally. Art serves and exists as a reflection or interpretation of real situations. If we see it in that way, 'art' turns out to be important.

MICHAEL: What do you think about the art world and the art market and how they function? The works of dead, famous artists continue to rake in millions at auction while living artists are struggling. Thoughts?

LIONEL: The art world is like an ocean wave; it comes and goes, sometimes the tide is low, sometimes it's high or colossal like a tsunami. Yes, that's true, but the prices are based on desire. People want, people afford things, prices go high. It's a game of

material goods. I appreciate the contribution of some dead artists, but I definitely support some living artists.

MICHAEL: What brought you to New York from Puerto Rico? Do you have family there? What are you doing there now? Does the city inspire you? Are you part of the art world?

LIONEL: I'm in New York and Puerto Rico at the same time. I know that it's hard to be physically, but it's interesting to live in two instances. All of my family lives in Puerto Rico. While in New York, I'm studying and working to develop my professional career and art practice. What inspires me about New York is the opportunity to have interesting conversation with people who are interested in arts, culture and new ideologies.

MICHAEL: So, what is your dream? What do you want your life to become? What do you want to be and why?

LIONEL: Wow, that's a tough one. My dream is to share with people from different cultures and learn from it. I want my life to become something interesting and worth to remember. I think I am already who I want to be. Now the idea is to shape it through time. We all are works in progress.

MICHAEL: How are you supporting yourself in New York? I think I saw that you're an art teacher or professor? Where do you teach? What's that experience like?

LIONEL: Yes, I work as a visual art instructor here in New York. My teaching philosophy stresses the idea of learning from each other like a network of mutual exchange, no hierarchy. In the sessions, we go over different models of learning and points of interest that come from the students. I respond to the class with lesson plans depending on the body of students and their needs. We discuss topics from visual culture, moving to complete technical work, forums of discussion and even performances, in some cases. I see my teaching process as a form of art/performance/collaborative work. My best interest is building communities that

not only do art but think on art, responding to visual stimulations of the 21st century and think outside of the box. I enjoy it a lot!

MICHAEL: Finally Lionel, why should people care about art? Art isn't curing cancer, ending poverty or ending homelessness. What's the point?

LIONEL: It's not about caring or not caring, it's about understanding the possibilities. Art functions by itself, but if it's really well thought out and ethically responsible, it can function to improve many aspects in the social spectrum. Perhaps the responsibility is on the artist to respond to these issues wisely. If society, institutions and communities want to keep nurturing egocentric artists, their artwork will not traced; the artist turns into a cancer itself.

MICHAEL: Thanks Lionel. Nice chat.

LIONEL: Thanks to you! This was a wonderful experience.

Check out Lionel Cruet at <http://www.lionelcruet.com/>.

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