

Curator Ana Sokoloff on Artist Alex Hank

Conversations with leading cultural figures
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Charlotte, Alex Hank, 2012 Courtesy sokoloff + associates, llc

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It is always interesting to note the reaction of an artist to upheavals in the political and economic context of their time. Often this is manifested in a change of course – be this in the subjects they choose to portray, the mood of their works or the addition of an overt political message. What is infinitely more rare is for an artist to alter the actual medium in which they work. Yet this is the case for former photographer, now painter **Alex Hank**. Prompted by the global economic crisis at the end of the last decade, Hank abandoned his camera, choosing instead to come to terms with the changing world order through the paintbrush; teaching himself and honing this new craft in the solitude of the studio. This exhibition of his work, entitled **Roommates**, is the first display of the results of this change in medium; featuring a collection of highly personal portraits of individuals who range from Hank's family and friends, to more recognisable faces such as **Charlotte Rampling** and Christopher Walken.

The differences between photography and painting are self-evident. In exchanging the one for the other, Hank has moved from the spontaneous, the ephemeral and the momentary to the ponderous contemplation of a single face in a single pose, crafting nuances and unwrapping emotions with every stroke of his brush. It is this element of "slowing down the act of looking" that attracts Hank to this mode of creativity. As he says: "All the people I paint are incredibly strong, so when I bring their softer, sadder, vulnerable side, it makes them real." Rendered in a palette of vibrant shades, there is a striking contrast between the huge scale and yet the intimacy of the works, between the brash colouration and the sensitivity with which the subjects unfurl on the canvas. Here, on the eve of the exhibition, [AnotherMag.com](#) speaks to the show's curator **Ana Sokoloff** about the impact Hank's work had on her, and the current status of the world art scene.

What gets you excited about new artists?

A youthful fresh approach to their surroundings and how this is later expressed into their work.

Walking into Alex's studio, what was it that made you realise the works were special?

A unique combination of the size, the bold colours and the gestural energy and strength of each painting. He somehow captures the sitter's intimate space and that creates a magnetic experience for the spectator.

Do you see correlations with his photographic work?

Although each portrait starts out with a photograph of the sitter, the portraits are much more about painting than photography; they explore the depths of the character of the sitter and the formal characteristics of classical portraiture in a more emotionally subjective way than his photographic work.

What are your feelings about the use of celebrities and famous faces in art?

They can be unhelpful if the work is not strong, yet in Alex's case it is a source of inspiration and excitement.

Where do you see Alex's work fitting into the current field of artists working in New York? And the wider art world?

New York hosts one of the most diverse populations of artists in the world, in a way it is a microcosm for the wider art world. Alex fits into the wider art world conversation adding his own voice to the realm of portraiture alongside Chuck Close, Julian Schnabel, and Elizabeth Peyton to name just a few.

As a champion and proponent of Latin American art in particular, who are the artists to watch in the field?

In The Ungovernables (<http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/448>) show at the New Museum there are a few artists from Latin America that I find intriguing, for example Jonathas de Andrade, Adrian Villar Rojas and Gabriel Sierra.

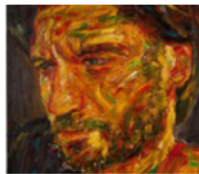
Roommates by Alex Hank

(http://www.lavitrina.com/artman/publish/article_1009.shtml) opens tomorrow at 548 West 22nd Street, New York, and runs until March 25.

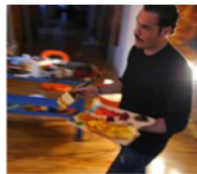
Tish Wrigley is the AnOther editorial assistant.



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